From Seeing to Achieving: Using Graphic Novels as a Tool to Support the Writing Skills
of Fifth Grade Boys

by
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Approval Page

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Abstract

From Seeing to Achieving: Using Graphic Novels as a Tool to Support the Writing Skills of Fifth Grade Boys. Sandra S. Sumerfield 2017: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education. Keywords: writing, graphic novels, engagement, motivation, boys

This study explored how using graphic novel features in the writing process influenced the motivation and engagement of fifth grade boys to write. Participants used graphica features to visually draft their narrative essays before crafting their final writing piece. During the drafting process, students were encouraged to engage in the revision process as their story ideas evolved through their drawings.

The theoretical framework supporting this research was cultural historical activity theory (CHAT), developed by Vygotsky (1978). In addition to CHAT, the researcher used the underpinnings of Rosenblatt's (1988) transactional theory as writers interacted with their written text.

The study was designed as a focused ethnography relying on qualitative data and supported by data that sought to quantify participant writer's self-perception along with motivation to write. Three questions guided this study:

1. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affect the writer self-perception of fifth grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program?

2. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affect the motivation to write of fifth grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program?

3. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, influence the use of descriptive vocabulary in the narrative writing of fifth grade boys?

Data were collected through observations, interviews, personal narratives, and the WSPS and MRP-R instruments developed to quantify motivation and self-perception about writing.

Overall, students demonstrated more engagement with, and a stronger commitment to, their writing. Participants became so motivated to write, they created a writing club (The Writers' Club) and continued to meet after completion of the study.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

With the publication of *A Nation At Risk* (U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the last three decades have brought high levels of research and debate about the literacy levels of grade school children in America and the importance of ensuring that all children can effectively read and write on grade level. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), of the 13,000 fourth grade students across the United States who were tested in writing, 40% received a Level 1 or 2 score, demonstrating an inadequate mastery of basic writing skills for their age group in 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012a). A year prior, eighth grade student results showed an even more concerning challenge on the writing assessment. In 2011, 74% of the 24,100 eighth grade students tested scored a basic or lower level on the NAEP assessment, demonstrating only a partial mastery of foundational knowledge and skills in writing on grade level (NCES, 2012b). Still more concerning was the performance of males students, who scored 20 points lower than their female peers in the NAEP 2011 writing assessment (NCES, 2012c). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine if participation in a series of afterschool writing workshops improved the writing and engagement of fifth grade boys in an urban school setting.

After 30 years of rigorous debate and in-depth research studies on the best way to engage readers and writers in our schools, not only have students not been able to close the gap on their deficiencies, the gap appears to widen between student abilities in writing proficiency between fourth and eighth grade, as measured on state standardized assessments. These data are critical for educators to consider, as students who do not

have the necessary foundational skills to compose their thoughts on writing assessments are now immersed in a 21st-century learning environment focused developing literate consumers and producers of multimodal materials that require more sophisticated skills and abilities. To that end, this study examined an innovative way of improving student performance on the state standardized writing assessment.

Research Problem

Between 1998 and 2002, writing scores at the fourth and eighth grade level showed a minimal increase, averaging 1% or less per year. Additionally, over 70% of all students taking the writing assessment remained at or below basic levels, indicating only partial mastery of grade level expectations in skills and knowledge (Greenwald, Persky, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999; Liu, Qian, & Thind, 2003). Although NAEP has not collected writing data on students in fourth grade since 2002, the data for eighth and twelfth grade students consistently shows a lack of growth, with more than 70% scoring at or below grade level mastery (Greenwald, et al., 1999; Liu et al., 2003; NCES, 2008; 2012b). Furthermore, the results highlighted a starker picture when comparing the scores based on gender. Overall, of the 24,100 eighth grade students taking the assessment in 2011, females scored 20 points higher on average than their male peers. Only 18% of the males taking the assessment scored in the proficient or higher range, and 27% fell in the below basic category, compared to only 12% of their female peers.

This failure rate in literacy development is a serious concern for all students, as the ability to effectively communicate through writing is a critical skill necessary to be successful in college and one's career. It is writing, which is the expressive component of literacy, that empowers citizens to contribute to effective change in their personal lives as

well as within their workplaces and their communities (Freedman, Flower, Hull, & Hayes, 1995). A survey conducted by The National Commission on Writing (2004) of over 100 major companies in America established that the skill of effective writing is becoming more prominent in today business world, with the expectancy that two-thirds of workers will be required to use writing in their daily duties. This expectation is often a prerequisite for securing a position as well as for consideration for future promotions (National Commission on Writing, 2004). Schools must then recognize that in order to prepare students for career readiness, effective oral and written skills are critical for a stable economic future for 21st-century learners, requiring more than simply providing teachers a document to assess academic performance.

Although equipping students with the skills to obtain employment after school is a fundamental obligation of schools, the significance in developing strong writing skills provides the writer the opportunity to develop coherent thoughts and express ideas in an intelligent manner. Writing allows the individual to linger over ideas to consider, while reflecting and reviewing details and how they are presented. Writing provides a level of permanence of thought that can be used to widely communicate ideas and information while extending knowledge and deepening comprehension (S. Graham, MacArthur, & Fitzgerald, 2007; Langer & Applebee, 1987). Although capturing potentially fleeting thoughts may be a slower and more challenging endeavor, the process of writing allows for contemplation and reasoning of ideas at a more sophisticated level (Langer & Applebee, 1987; Nagin, 2006). Equally as important is the permanence of these ideas allows the writer to discover new concepts and make vital connections to previous understandings (S. Graham et al., 2007). Therefore, the intervention in the study provided

an opportunity for fifth grade boys who are not meeting the most basic grade-level expectations on the writing assessment to explore their personal writing process through the innovative medium of graphica, which is described later in this chapter.

Deficiencies in the Evidence

This study sought to understand ways to improve writing outcomes and to increase student engagement in becoming more capable writers. Based on the NAEP results, some students have proven to be capable and skilled writers, while many students have been unable to experience such success. With such an emphasis in schools on reading and math, there are a limited number of studies which explore strategies for developing more motivated and engaged writers. Furthermore, this study explored the use of visual tools found in the imagery of graphic novels to help students increase the descriptive vocabulary in their writing.

With a deficiency in research on writing, it is possible to consider the use of reading research to support literacy development, as competency in both reading and writing are two of the primary cornerstones of what it means to be literate. During the 1980s, researchers became interested in the reading-writing relationship and produced a body of data that explored the independence and interrelated nature of both. Stotsky (1983) detailed a report that showed the body of research on the relationship between reading and writing over previous 50 years. Based on her analysis of the studies conducted, she concluded that stronger writers are typically stronger readers, they tend to read more than poorer writers do, and that stronger readers produce more sophisticated writing than poorer readers. Stotsky further reported that teachers who use instructional practices using rich reading experiences and literary models over skill-focused

experiences enrich the writing outcomes of their students. While there are limited studies specifically focused on tools used to improve writing, it is through the interrelationship between reading and writing that research on reading was evaluated for possible applications to writing.

One tool educators have used to support struggling and disengaged readers has been the graphic novel. Graphic novels have been instrumental in helping readers who have traditionally struggled with engagement as well as comprehension. Many readers who may find challenges with print-centric text connect with graphic novels as the visual elements provide another way for them to make meaning, participate in the dialogue, and view themselves as literate (Gavigan, 2011).

Audience

The audience that may benefit from this research are school districts, teaching staff, curriculum writers, and parents. One way to foster growth for students as writers is for educators to explore alternate ways to help them make meaning and express ideas and understanding through writing. Students who strengthen their writing skills and become more competent writers will find more success in college and careers after completing their education (Nagin, 2006).

Definition of Terms

Graphica. Thompson (2008) defined graphica as "a medium of literature that integrates pictures and words and arranges them cumulatively to tell a story or convey information; often presented in comic strip, periodical, or book form" (p. 6).

Graphic novels. The term graphic novel was coined by Eisner (1978/2006) and introduced in the preface of his first graphic novel, where he defined it as "a serious

novel told in art, not text" (p. x). Since this original definition was created almost 40 years ago, experts in the field have refined the definition with more concise descriptors and language that better support understanding of the medium. Carter (2007) defined the graphic novel as "a book-length sequential art narrative featuring an anthology-style collection of comic book art, a collection of reprinted comic book issues comprising a single story line (or arc), or an original, stand-alone graphic narrative" (p. 1).

Multimodal literacy. "Multimodal literacy refers to meaning-making that occurs through the reading, viewing, understanding, responding to and producing and interacting with multimedia and digital texts. It may include oral and gestural modes of talking, listening and dramatizing as well as writing, designing, and producing such texts" (Walsh, 2010, p. 213).

The writing process. Beginning in the late 1970s, Murray (1997) began his work encouraging educators to consider writing as an evolving process of using language to discover, explore, and communicate, rather than a final product deemed with a goal of completing a finished piece. Originally, Murray defined three distinct stages of the writing process: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. Calkins (1986) and D. Graves (1983) expanded on Murray's (1997) original thesis, evolving into the five-step process most practiced in modern writing classrooms: prewriting, drafting, revision, editing, and publishing. All of these steps are critical opportunities for the writer to develop ideas as they consider the written discourse they are crafting (D. Graves, 1983).

Visual literacy. Visual literacy is the ability to interpret as well as produce visual messages and communications including text, images, and other types of graphic elements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this focused ethnography was to determine if participation in a series of afterschool workshops using a graphic novel-based activity improved the writing and engagement of fifth grade boys in an urban school setting. Qualitative data in the form of observations, independent surveys, open-ended interviews, and focus group responses were collected and coded to understand the students' perspectives on the effect the workshops had on their self-perception in the writing process as well as on their motivation to write. Surveys were administered to support the observation data and to gain better insight into student self-perceptions and motivation to write. Additionally, pre and post-writing samples were collected to evaluate if the graphic novel format used in the drafting process influenced the outcome of the quality of descriptive vocabulary used as well as the quantity of words written.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review explores the current research on ways to support students in developing stronger writing skills using multimodal tools. The research studies cited are scholarly articles from current peer-reviewed journals and academic dissertations.

The first main topic in the literature review establishes the rationale for children's literacy growth and exploration using writing as a tool to express thoughts and make connections as children learn. The second topic investigates the existing research on using multimodal learning strategies and visual literacy strategies to support students in meaning-making as they develop more sophisticated literacy skills and strategies. The third section of the literature review discusses the limited research available on the use of graphic novel features and the use of storyboards in the drafting process to influence vocabulary usage in students' writing. The lack of empirical study on the use of graphic novels and storyboarding to improve writing was the primary rationale for this study.

Background and Justification

Before the early 1980s, schools across the United States operated in relative isolation of one another, working independently to serve their regional population and equally addressing all areas of the school curriculum. However, in 1981 a panel of experts, the U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education, was assembled under the directive of President Ronald Reagan to study the state of American schools. Two of the priorities the panel was tasked to determine were the quality of education American school children were receiving, along with how our schools compared to other developed nations around the world. After 18 months of gathering information, in 1983 the panel published the final report: *A Nation At Risk.* With strong language proclaiming that

America's school system was failing our children, this report created an immediate panic across the country (U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The writers of this emotionally charged report called for massive educational reform, as they denounced, "…the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and as a people" (U.S. National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1). In the report, the panel detailed many key findings, such as the steady decline of SAT reading scores, which indicated our schools were failing.

This impassioned document, *A Nation at Risk*, was the foundation for sweeping reforms throughout schools across the nation, most significantly was Public Law PL 107-110, more commonly known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002). The impact of NCLB would transform daily classroom practice and have an indelible impact on the lives of students in every classroom across the United States for years to come. Although NCLB required that all states across the nation enact rigorous content standards in reading, math, science, and writing, schools were mandated to test students annually to make annual yearly progress (AYP) on student test scores in only math and reading (Pederson, 2007). As accountability for writing, among other subjects, was not required, states soon began to report that the non-tested areas of curriculum were beginning to experience a reduction of resources and soon became practically nonexistent in the daily classroom schedule (Pederson, 2007).

According to the College Board (2013), the organization responsible for the internationally accepted college entrance exam (SAT), American college-bound seniors' SAT reading scores have continued a steady decline in the 30 years since *A Nation At*

Risk was published and the recommendations outlined by the panel were enacted. More specifically, between 1972 and 2013, college-bound seniors' critical reading scores on the SAT has dropped 35 points, from 531 down to 496 (College Board, 2013). These facts are important to consider in light of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) report, which emphasized the importance of a college education for job seekers in the 21st century. This information has immense implications for the youth who are currently enrolled in our school system and who are making plans for their future with the expectation that they are adequately prepared for college. The report details that the top 20 highest paying occupations require a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Furthermore, jobs that require a college degree are growing at a rate of 2 to 1 over jobs not requiring any college experience at all (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010).

With the reduction and, in some cases, eradication of writing lessons in the classroom, teachers are now beginning to see the erosion of the complex skills that sophisticated writers must possess, as indicated by the declining scores reported by NAEP. As mastery of writing requires sustained effort, concern is growing that these students who are struggling with a school-based test will not be prepared for the rigor of college writing or jobs in the 21st century workforce (Alber-Morgan, Hessler, & Konrad, 2007; Nagin, 2006). This decline in writing in schools, juxtaposed with the increasing need for writing skills in the 21st century, has created a gap that experts believe leave our students progressively unprepared for life outside of high school (The National Commission on Writing, 2004).

Theoretical Framework and Supporting Perspectives

Although many theorists have developed conflicting viewpoints, an equal number

have similar underpinnings that can be divergent in nature, while also being complimentary. The theoretical framework for this study was based on the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Rosenblatt (1988), who studied learning as the center of the semiotic process, recognizing that learning does not happen in a vacuum, but rather is social in nature. In particular, learners construct meaning from text based on their personal experiences, which are directly influenced by their social and cultural position. It is for this reason that learning is affected by both the reader's and writer's past and present experiences.

Cultural historical activity theory. The cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994) is a theoretical framework developed in the 1920s by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his students, Aleksei Leont'ev and Aleksandr Luria. The fundamental theory in CHAT focuses on humans using tools in interaction with their environment to make meaning, rather than engaging directly (Tatum, 2009). Although tools can be external in nature, such as a hammer, a lever, or another person, it is the internal or psychological tools, such as language, which humans use to develop mastery of their world as they make meaning through interactions with others (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994).

Vygotsky (1978) recognized the importance of tools and how they change the relationship between people and their environment. He understood the metacognitive process of language development children underwent using inner-speech and internal dialogue to compose and revise their writing over time (Everson, 1991). CHAT theorizes that humans actively use language as the tool to investigate, understand, and develop new meaning through their interactions, and it is through language that humans can

communicate with society, which ultimately affects who they become (Blanton,

Menendez, Moorman, & Pacifici, 2003; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Vygotsky, along with

his students Leont'ev, and Luria, explored the importance of speech as a tool in the

evolution of a child's development, and the role that culture plays in shaping intellect and

in individuals becoming social beings. It is the combination of language and action that

supports social engagement, which ultimately develops the child's development and

intellectual growth (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994).

Vygotsky (1978) proposed that the development of a metalanguage occurs when

people use a new tool that compels the advancement of new concepts, and, along with

that tool, the vocabulary that supports these new ideas and knowledge. Through exposure

to appropriate teacher modeling and scaffolded opportunities to use this new vocabulary,

students begin to internalize new words and their meanings and use them in the context

of the controlled class environment and in their work with the new tool. In time, students

can apply this new metalanguage, which represents their metacognition, to different

situations outside of the original context and experiences (Blanton, Pilonieta & Wood,

2007; Coltman, 2006; Tobin & Blanton, 2014).

Transactional theory. Rosenblatt (1988) developed the transactional theory of

reading and writing in the mid 20th century as a way to better understand the unique

relationship that takes place between a reader, the writer, and the text with which they

engage. Rosenblatt understood that there is a transactional relationship occurring between

humans and their environment, including how they use language to make meaning. The

reader makes meaning when engaging, or transacting, with the text. It is through this

transaction that new meaning is created, as the readers bring background knowledge and

life experiences to the text, which elicits a unique meaning. Therefore, the important ideas that develop from a text are not the author's ideas, but instead, occur as the reader responds to the words on the page. "A story or poem or play is merely ink spots on paper until a reader transforms them into a set of meaningful symbols" (Rosenblatt, 1956, p. 66). Rosenblatt posited that the meaning of the printed word is a relationship between the symbols on the page and the experiences and emotion the reader instills at the time, and for this reason, the meaning is variable among individual readers as well as the mood and perspective of each person.

Just as with the reader in the transactional theory, writers interact with the text they have previously written, continually planning for how to support what they have written, and then conclude each piece. Although writers only have their linguistic capital as a resource when making decisions about how to fill the blank pages before them, there is an engagement with the perspective audience to be considered as they make decisions about word choice and meaning expressed (Rosenblatt, 1988). Additionally, writers continually transact with their personal experiences and emotions as they linguistically capture their thoughts and feelings at the time of writing, and their written text is strongly influenced by both their personal and social positions (Rosenblatt, 1988). By engaging purely with the flow of language, without considerations of structure or mechanics, writers are better able to trigger the stream of unguarded ideas to access their personal experiences by activating their linguistic reservoir (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 11).

Becoming Literate

Traditionally, the term literacy refers to the ability to read and write, and the cognitive skills needed to navigate printed text (Messaris, 1997). Historically, schools

emphasized the importance of becoming literate by supporting students in becoming proficient readers. In recent years, educators have begun to redefine what skills students need to become literate, as we prepare our students to proactively engage with 21st-century materials and experiences. Although a simple dictionary search indicates that literacy is "the ability to read and write" ("Literacy," 2017) upon deeper inquiry, literacy is a complex idea that is continually evolving as a person's ways of knowing and communicating progress. Literacy is an active learning process utilizing a tangible set of reading and writing skills that supports the interpretation and understanding of specific information (UNESCO, 2005). Becoming literate is a multifaceted and intricate process that extends beyond effectively reading and writing to a culturally based way of thinking, interacting, and learning, using language to connect to background experiences to create new meaning (Langer & Flihan, 2000; Nagin, 2006; Stotsky, 1983; Walsh, 2010).

According to the constructivist theory, both reading and writing use language as a tool to make meaning. While reading and writing have separate knowledge structures, research has shown a synergistic connection that exists in both processes, and that learning to read and learning to write are skills that strengthen each other (Langer & Flihan, 2000; Nagin, 2006; Shanahan, 1987). During reading and writing experiences, meaning is in an ever-evolving state as the reader/writer considers new ideas, reflects on their schema, and, as a result, their ideas are transformed (Langer & Flihan, 2000). Becoming literate not only emphasizes the relationship of both reading and writing, but how these essential skills influence the relationship between the student and the world they live in, as the ability to read one's world empowers one to transcend it (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

While a person's receptive literacy governs their ability to understand and receive information about their world through reading, listening, and viewing, it is one's expressive language that controls their ability to communicate and actively engage with their world through speaking and writing (Walmsley, 2008). An important part of becoming literate is elevating the significance of writing as a tool to enhance thinking and advance learning across all content areas, as it is the process of writing that helps develop clarity, insight, and a way of knowing and understanding at a deeper level (Kotelman, Saccani, & Gilbert, 2006).

Writing

Although reading and writing are complementary skills, there is a significant discrepancy in how schools address these skills, which consequently affects a student's level of mastery in each. Often the challenge is the minimal amount of time spent on writing development in the classroom, which is negligible when compared to time spent reading (Miller & McCardle, 2010; Nagin, 2006; National Writing Project, 2003). Furthermore, researchers have reported that many teachers readily admit that the minimal time spent on writing is focused on the lower-level skills of writing conventions, such as grammar, spelling, and responses demonstrating comprehension of reading material, rather than teaching writing as a craft that supports in-depth thinking and learning (Graham & Hebert, 2010; Nagin, 2006). However, writing is becoming more widely respected as a critical skill and an intricate craft that challenges students to think and process information in new ways, rather than an exercise that produces a response to reading (Grossman, Valencia, & Hamel, 1997; Nagin, 2006). Because of the complexity of mastering the skills and sub-skills of writing, developing sophisticated writers requires

considerable amounts of time spent in practice, guided by well-trained educators (National Writing Project, 2003).

As this shift in awareness takes place, preeminent organizations such as the International Reading Association have adjusted their focus and mission statement to reflect the importance of all aspects of becoming literate. Accordingly, this organization has changed their name to the International Literacy Association (ILA) to take into account this broader perspective. This shift in thinking acknowledges that emphasizing reading as the only area we need to nurture for students to become literate is not enough to prepare the 21st-century learners that populate classrooms today.

Writing as thinking and learning. Although the ability to be a competent writer is becoming an essential qualification of the 21st-century employee, engaging in meaningful writing tasks throughout school has far-reaching benefits (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Extensive and open-ended writing experiences such as essay writing as compared to short-answer literal responses frees students to make connections and think broadly about a topic, allowing for flexibility and depth in thought across content and ideas (Langer & Applebee, 1987; Langer & Flihan, 2000). Equally as important as pushing students to think deeper about ideas, the mental exercise of writing and reflection supports students in developing higher order thinking skills that evolve ideas, questions previous thinking, and allows for critical reflection on new positions. Committing ideas to the page creates a permanence of thought that supports awareness of one's thinking and provides the opportunity to reconsider and build from previous positions (Hebert, Gillespie, & Graham, 2013; Langer & Applebee, 1987; Nagin, 2006). As writers build relationships that connect ideas, they carefully consider the specificity of word choices

that communicate reasoning and transform thinking (Herbert et al. 2013; Klein, 1999; Nagin, 2006). According to Burke, as with writing, these critical opportunities , as with writing, are the foundation for intellectual growth: "Every time a person reads (draws, dances, sings, computes), he/she is putting their intellectual life at risk for change" (as cited in Stephens, Mills, Short & Vasquez, 2008, p. 140).

Writing and drawing. Drawing, similar to writing, involves the mastery of psychomotor skills and cognitive abilities that coordinate eye, hand, and brain movements (Bromley, 2011; Jalongo, 2007; Mackenzie, 2011). Research conducted from the early1980s through the turn of the century supports the relationship that exists between the two skills. These studies indicate that students who are allowed to draw as part of the prewriting stage show improvement in the quality of content and length of final writing pieces (Caldwell & Moore, 1991; Calkins, 1986; Dyson, 1990; Harste, Woodward, & Burke, 1984; Norris, Mokhtari, & Reichard, 1998). It is the familiar structure of drawing that, while appearing nonacademic in nature, is a communicative and metacognitive process that provides the scaffolding to support children as they take on the rigor and challenge writing can often present (Brooks, 2009; Calkins, 1986; D. Graves, 1983; Mackenzie, 2011). Having the freedom to convey meaning as they process their inner speech through a whole image rather than through a linear, phonetic process allows students to externalize what they need to say in the early stages, without rules of mechanics that can create obstacles in expression (Everson, 1991). Drawing can provide an opportunity for a student to elaborate on an idea, making thinking visible, and, with more focus, they become fully engaged and are able to make greater connections between complex concepts (Brooks, 2009).

Vygotsky (1978) posited that symbols such as drawings are tools children use to make meaning, which supports cognition and advanced mental functions (Andrzejczak, Trainin, & Poldberg, 2005; Brooks, 2009; Levin & Bus, 2003). As a form of language, drawing is a medium that focuses attention, supports the construction of ideas, and makes the evolution of thought visible (Brooks, 2009). Due to the abbreviated nature of inner speech, significant gaps in meaning are often created when students rely only on words to communicate their thinking. Drawing is a metacognitive and cultural tool that supports higher mental functions in children and provides a scaffold for communicating minute graphic details early on in the writing process (Brooks, 2004, 2009; Everson, 1991; Levin & Bus, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

Multimodal Literacy

As the ever-evolving definition of text expands to include information from multiple modes, including images and drawings, it is imperative that teachers ensure their classroom practice reflects the changing face of literacy by incorporating the various tools students will use as well as the paths they will take in becoming literate. Multimodal theory is grounded in social semiotics and posits that communication, understanding, and learning occurs through multiple modes, or socially produced sign systems, of which language is only a part (Albers & Harste, 2007; Hendriksen & Kress, 2012). It is through the integration of multiple modes that people make meaning of information they receive and develop a deeper understanding of an idea or topic (Albers & Harste, 2007; Jewitt & Kress, 2003; Hendriksen & Kress, 2012). Historically, writing has held the predominant role of communicating information in literate society and, therefore, has been accepted as the primary method of gathering information. However, multimodal theory suggests all

modes carry meaning that combine in different ways to a common idea and produce a multifaceted connection, creating deeper and more meaningful understanding (Hendriksen & Kress, 2012).

In 2008, the National Council of Teachers of English developed a position statement that expresses the importance of equipping students with a varying range of skills and abilities, across many literacies, to keep pace with the intensity and complexity of what it means to be literate in the 21st century (NCTE, 2013). Since culture and literacy are interconnected, and as cultures are rapidly changing with technology, multimodal learning has gained more significance, and school literacy practices also must evolve to prepare learners to use 21st-century tools (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; NCTE, 2013). This shift from a mono-modal presentation of expressing and receiving information provides opportunities for learners to communicate authentic ways of knowing and understanding (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001). The multimodal practice of linking images with text increases a writer's ability to process ideas and provides a path to express those thoughts, as the print and pictures combined create a more meaningful message (Bomer, 2008; Bomer, Zoh, David, & Ok, 2010). Multimodal literacy practices support learning that integrates multiple semiotic resources during reading, writing, considering, creating, discussing, and listening to all forms of communication (Jewitt & Kress, 2003; NCTE, 2016; Serafini, 2013; Walsh, 2010). With these shifts, students must become more fluent at making meaning using multiple semiotic systems that provide opportunities to demonstrate their thinking and grow in their understanding of the metalanguage of new semiotic modes (Kress, 2003; The New London Group, 1996).

Visual literacy. Visual literacy refers to the ability to interpret and produce visual

messages and communications that include text, images, and some graphic elements (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). The simple phrase "A picture is worth a thousand words" acknowledges that a visual image is a tool that can instantly communicate the deepest feelings, concepts, and ideas, and that its power is universally understood across all fields of study, cultures, and languages. NCTE (2016) stated that while there are a number of important modes learners use to make meaning, visual elements are critical for the transmission of information and that these "modes of communication and expression transform the meaning of the work beyond illustration or decoration" (p. 1). Without the sensory experience of processing images, words and their text definitions lack the depth of meaning that allows a reader to connect on a personal level of understanding (Bell, 2007).

Today, while visual representations are honored as a comprehensive semiotic process when children are young, once the alphabet has been mastered drawing is replaced by writing, and is quickly dismissed as frivolous and as a less valuable mode of expression (Mackenzie, 2011). While writing will always remain a critical skill and an important form of communication, visual representations provide different information that writers can borrow from as they begin to compose in a more traditional, print-based format (M. Graham & Benson, 2010; Martinez & Nolte-Yupari, 2015; Serafini, 2013).

Vocabulary

Research conducted documenting the correlation between an extensive vocabulary and superior reading comprehension is widely received and acknowledged (Anderson & Nagy, 1991; Baker, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 1995; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). To gain strength as a reader, there must be a strong emphasis placed on the

continual improvement of vocabulary that includes both the quality and quantity of word knowledge (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Bush (2007) documented the use of pictures to bolster vocabulary development beginning in the early 20th century. The use of images provides context and allows the student to connect new ideas with previously learned concepts. Thornbury (2002) posited that while any image can impact vocabulary learning, detailed illustrations created by students provide the strongest results in the acquisition and retention of new vocabulary. However, while there is substantial evidence linking vocabulary development to reading comprehension, there remains a deficiency of research on the importance of vocabulary development in writing development.

Since communication is the objective of writing, precision of language, facilitated by a rich vocabulary, is a critical component in becoming a skilled writer. Experts often disagree over the specific quantity of words children should possess at each grade level (Anderson & Freebody, 1981), partially due to the challenge of how to define a word (M. Graves, 2006; Nagy & Anderson, 1984). According to Nagy and Anderson (1984), what is more significant in determining the growth of a writer is the advancement of one's vocabulary. It is the volume of experiences, coupled with immersion in rich language experiences, which significantly influences the development of a more sophisticated vocabulary (Nagy & Anderson, 1984; Stanovich, 1986; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002).

The inclusion of descriptive vocabulary in essays is an essential component of effective writing. The fifth grade Common Core State Standards (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3) emphasize the importance of descriptive details in student writing as a means of effectively communicating ideas and engaging the reader in the written piece:

"The student will write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Through careful consideration and precise word choices, writers can create a particular mood within a setting as well as explore the experiences, attitudes, and emotions of a character. Beck, McKeown, and Kucan (2013) emphasized the importance of word choice as a critical aspect of writing that is highlighted as a key measurement on writing rubrics. It is the mastery of word knowledge and usage that is a hallmark of exceptional writing as, "it is the content of language, especially the use and diversity of vocabulary, that teachers look for when their students are communicating meaning" (Beck et al., 2013, p. 139).

The use of descriptive vocabulary in a literary text is one of the four traditional discourses in writing, along with narration, argumentation, and exposition (McClanahan, 2014). It is the descriptive type of discourse that allows the writer to communicate meaning precisely, supporting readers in becoming intimately involved with the topic. With access to a reservoir of rich, visual language, writers can create clear images with vivid words that will paint a picture of the story setting as well as develop unique characters with depth, which convey emotions, attitudes, and perspectives that bring them to life (McClanahan, 2014). Equally as important, the use of sensory language can help a reader engage with the text by accessing the senses of sight, smell, taste, and touch. However, for writers to effectively involve the reader, they must first possess a rich vocabulary that provides the opportunity to successfully communicate specific mental imagery, immersing the reader in the story. McClanahan (2014) explained that it is the

well-crafted narrative that "invites the reader to unpack his bags and sit a spell, as description composed of sensory details penetrates layers of consciousness, engaging your reader emotionally as well as intellectually" (p. 10).

Gender Roles in Education

During the 1990s a great deal of attention and research focused on the challenges girls faced in school systems around the world. This attention was the beginning of a movement, which continues today, examining the role gender plays in teaching and learning in the classroom (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). While many early studies concluded that girls were being denied equal educational experiences (Bailey, 1992), by the later part of the 1990s and the early part of the 21st century, many researchers began to compare the shifts in opportunities for girls to the challenges that also plagued boys in the classroom (Weaver-Hightower, 2003).

According to Sax (2012), the academic challenges boys face in schools continue, creating a growing gap in achievement with each generation. The U.S. Department of Education reported that, since 1988, girls have consistently surpassed boys on national writing assessments, with eleventh grade boys scoring equivalent to their eight grade female peers (NCES, 2012b). On the 2011 NAEP eighth grade writing assessment, 41% of girls scored proficient or higher, compared to only 19% of boys (NCES, 2012b). As reported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012), concerns about providing equal opportunities for boys and girls in schools are not limited to the American school system; these trepidations extends internationally. The OECD administers the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) every three years to approximately 510,000 students, in 65 countries and economies, assessing

students in the areas of science, reading, mathematic, and financial literacy to monitor the critical skills and knowledge they are acquiring. Of particular interest in the 2012 PISA results was the reading literacy data demonstrating that, globally, boys consistently lag behind girls, scoring an average of 38% lower in reading and writing.

The challenges for boys. While culture does influence how students approach reading and writing activities, research being conducted using brain imaging indicates that the physical differences between the brains of boys and girls also should be considered as a factor in how schools approach the development and implementation of learning experiences for all students (Fletcher, 2006; Gurian, 2005; Gurian & Stevens, 2004). Researchers have studied images created with positron emission tomography (PET) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technologies to map the structure of the brain and gain greater insights into how regions influence behavior and learning. These researchers have pinpointed over 100 structural differences between the brains of boys and girls, indicating that biology plays a role in influencing gender differences in learning and the processing of information (Gurian, Henley, & Trueman, 2001; King & Gurian, 2006; Sax, 2005).

Specialized visual processing cells in the brain that support shapes and movement are more pronounced in the male brain (Sax, 2005). Consequently, boys gain more benefits from using pictures when reading and writing (King & Gurian, 2006). Critical sections of the brain that are responsible for processing language, listening, detailed memory storage, and verbal processing are more developed in the brains of girls. In addition, girls have, on average, 15% more blood flow to the brain, which acts as a stimulant, providing a learning advantage in the areas of reading and writing (Gurian,

2005; Gurian & Stevens, 2004; King & Gurian, 2006). However, these differences are simply that, differences, and not a claim of one gender being better or worse (Sax, 2005). While the verbal processing area in the brains of boy can be up to 50% smaller than that of the girls, the more developed area of the brain of a boy relates to mechanical-spatial functioning. These more developed cortical regions create more meaningful interactions using and manipulating symbols, diagrams, and pictures (Fletcher, 2006; Gurian, 2005; Gurian & Stevens, 2004; Sax, 2005).

With all of the emphasis on learning styles, multiple intelligences, and multimodal learning theory, educators have developed an appreciation that there are multiple ways of learning, expressing ideas, and making meaning. With the mission of meeting the needs of all students, many teachers and researchers have considered alternate ways of reaching each student that extend beyond a traditional language-based curriculum (Olshansky, 2008).

Graphic Novels

Graphic novels and their educational value have had a controversial and colorful history. While many may debate whether graphic novels qualify as literature (Thompson, 2008), few would disagree on the attraction their engaging images and storylines have held over children throughout the generations. Numerous experts in a broad field of study have developed working definitions of graphic novels in a variety of ways. Collectively, all can agree that graphic novels are a book-length narrative incorporating comic-style art with text that includes traditional story features such as character development, plot sequence, and a conflict-resolution framework (Carter, 2007; Cary, 2004; Eisner, 1985; Thompson, 2008). However, graphic novels are often mistaken as a genre, even by

leading organizations such as the ILA (Tucker & Tucker, 2014). Leading experts in the field of graphica, a term that encompasses graphic novels, comics, and manga (Thompson, 2008), say that texts utilizing this format are not a genre, but rather they are a medium writers use to tell their story or message across any genre (Eisner, 1985; McCloud, 1993; Syma & Weiner, 2013; Thompson, 2008).

A brief history of the graphica medium in the United States. While the power of telling a story and using images to transmit thoughts and communicate experiences has been with humans since the days of cave paintings, the medium of comics and sequential storytelling through images and text gained popularity and became more organized in the early 1930s (Cary, 2004; Eisner, 2008; McTaggert, 2008; Thompson, 2008; Tucker & Tucker, 2014). Before 1930, comics were typically published in newspapers using either a single frame format or a short series of frames. In the early 1930s, publishers began compiling newspaper strips into a book format, and by 1935 the first 32-page comic book was created, which continues to be the standard format of comic books still today (Jimenez, 2013). By the end of the 1930s, as Americans prepared to engage in the ongoing World War II, comics reflected the patriotic mood of the nation. It was this sentiment that gave birth to the first Superman comic book in 1938, followed by Wonder Woman, Batman, Captain America, and Captain Marvel (Jimenez, 2013; Tucker & Tucker, 2014; Weiner, 2003). The popularity of the medium soared through the 1940s and 1950s, as children and adults alike became enamored with the growing body of new superheroes and everyday people who celebrated the foibles and joys of being human.

During this period, readership grew at a phenomenal rate with adults who embraced this medium as political entertainment that extolled the pro-America and anti-

Hitler sentiment that was pervasive at the time (Weiner, 2003). Readership growth had

been particularly impressive among children outside of school, and teachers began to

notice and embrace ways to use this momentum in the classroom (Thompson, 2008). In

1949, researchers at New York University conducted a study to understand better if the

medium of comics held any value as instructional materials in the classroom

(Hutchinson, 1949). After using a series of prepared comics in their classrooms for 13

weeks, the final survey of the 438 classroom teachers who participated in the study

responded that the medium held value, and particularly for students in the middle age

range. Teachers reported an increase in student engagement and interest when using

materials in comic format as well as an improvement in oral and written langue usage

(Hutchinson, 1949).

However, all of this fervor came to a sudden halt with the 1954 publication,

Seduction of the Innocent, by Fredrick Wertham. Wertham's (1954) book blamed comics

for the rebellion of youth, the moral decay of American society, and the rising illiteracy

rates in America (Sabeti, 2012; Thompson, 2008; Walker, 2013). Wertham testified

before the Senate, espousing his unscientific opinions, and investigations were conducted

to understand the validity of his claims better. While ultimately his claims were

unfounded, committees were created to monitor the effects on society; ultimately the

momentum of the medium and its potential usage in schools came to a rapid halt

(Thompson, 2008; Weiner, 2003).

During the 1970s, the emotional rhetoric of Wertham's claim began to diminish,

and the comic book began to reappear in classrooms. The 1970s also saw an evolution in

the category of graphica, with the inception of the graphic novel. In 1978, Eisner created

and published the first graphic novel, *A Contract With God*. Eisner began his career in

1940 creating weekly comic books for a Sunday newspaper. During the three decades of

creating short stories, he believed the medium had the potential for a richer, full-length

format, and therefore coined the term graphic novel to gain the attention of mainstream

publishers (Eisner, 1978/2006). Following the example Eisner set, in 1980 Art

Spiegelman began a series of graphic stories developed from interviews with his father

on his experiences as a Jewish man living in Poland during the Holocaust. The final

compilation, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, was completed and published in 1991, and became

the first graphic novel to win a Pulitzer Prize in 1992.

   Current use of graphic novels in research and practice. Since the business of

learning to read is grounded in the ability to decode text, much of the goal of developing

more sophisticated readers is to discourage students from relying on the visual

information provided by picture books as they become more capable of decoding the

words on the page. However, many teachers do not subscribe to this principle, as they

understand the fundamental role a visual image such as a diagram, chart, table, or graph

plays in communicating meaning through relationships and perspective (Moline, 1995).

   It is with this awareness that the visual imagery used in graphic novels has

become a valuable tool in learning to read and develop stronger comprehension skills in

the classroom. The importance of visual imagery dates back to the earliest days of human

existence through cave paintings, which helped writers communicate information and

readers understand the complex ideas (Carter, 2009). Although often considered simple,

many visual texts such a graphic novels convey complex ideas through sophisticated

images that communicate deep, multilayered concepts that support visual literacy skills in

all readers (Moline, 1995). During the latter part of the 1990s, educators began to

consider the challenges they faced in meeting the needs of the 21st century learners and

scholars began to reconsider the possible use of graphic novels, recognizing the

importance of visual tools in supporting the needs of all students. Though the

contributions that graphic stories provide in an academic environment have been

questioned and challenged over the last century, many educators and researchers

recognize the significance of using images to scaffold (Vygotsky, 1978) and support the

development of literacy skills that deepen comprehension and promote effective

communication (Bell, 2007; Frey & Fisher, 2008; Olshansky, 2008). In today's

technology-centric world, Lyga and Lyga (2004) stated that our students are dependent

on visual information, and has coined the term "generation visual" (p. 8). Burmark (2008)

posited that because of the dominance of visual communication, 21st century classrooms

must acknowledge that visual literacy is the primary literacy to address:

> It is no longer enough to be able to read and write. Our students must learn to
>
> process both words and pictures. To be visually literate, they must learn to 'read'
>
> (consume/interpret) images and 'write' (produce/use) visually rich
>
> communications. They must be able to move gracefully and fluently between text
>
> and images, between literal and figurative worlds. (p. 5)

By utilizing materials that interweave text and images, students can access two

semiotic modes that enrich the meaning being communicated (Albers & Harste, 2007;

Hendriksen & Kress, 2012; Jewitt & Kress, 2003). The ability to employ the content from

one semiotic mode to another is a critical skill necessary to develop new understandings

as students access meanings from multiple modes (Hadjioannou & Hutchinson, 2014;

Kress, 1997; Mills, 2011; Short & Harste, 1996; Suhor, 1984; Wells-Rowe, 2009). Even

more, students must be able to translate ideas and information from one mode to another,

a process called transmediation (Suhor, 1984) as well as move content from one mode to

another, a process call transduction (Kress, 1997).

While there is a dearth of research on using graphic novels to support writing

instruction, there has been significantly more research done on the utilization of the

medium to support reading comprehension and engagement with texts. Educators and

librarians alike acknowledge the enthusiasm and eagerness students demonstrate as they

read graphic novels (Carter, 2007; Panteleo, 2012; Thompson, 2008; Weiner, 2003).

According to Krashen (2004), students who read for pleasure and choose their reading

materials see improvements in reading comprehension, both of pleasure and academic

text; become stronger writers; and grow more extensive vocabulary. The graphica

medium, including both comic books and graphic novels, provides opportunities for

children to read for pleasure, while also providing a rich opportunity for language

development. While there are comics written for younger children, many popular comics

such as The Incredible Hulk, Superman, and Batman, among others, have been evaluated

using the Fry Graph Readability Formula and have scored at the readability range

between sixth and tenth grade (Krashen, 2004; Wright, 1979)

Research conducted through The Comic Book Project at Teacher's College in

2002 concluded that including the arts in academic experiences supports stronger literacy

skill development (Bitz, 2004). In this study, close to 90% of the 733 participants stated

that using pictures helped them better understand inferred details and helped them

improve their writing. Of the 46 instructors surveyed at the end of the project, over 90%

stated that the students now enjoyed writing and that their writing had improved (Bitz, 2004).

 Boys and graphic novels. While graphic stories such as comic books are read not only by boys, research concludes that boys engage with comics considerably more than girls (Carter, 2009; McKenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1991; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Ujiie & Krashen, 1996). Educators understand that boys and girls learn differently, and that it is important to consider the research on learning styles that capitalize on the best pedagogical approach as well as the use of learning materials that best support half of the population of schools (Fletcher, 2006; Gurian, 2005; Gurian & Stevens, 2004). Supplying materials that engage and motivate boys to read counteracts the decline in reading skills, which occurs when they are reluctant to read (Brozo, 2010; Merisuo-Storm, 2006). Brain research that supports the visual processing abilities of boys (Sax, 2005) supports the use of images that provide critical clues for making meaning (Brozo, 2010). The image-centric format of the graphic novel supports the visual-spatial acuity of boys and naturally holds their attention (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Thompson, 2008; Ujiie & Krashen, 1996).

 Graphic novels and writing. With an emphasis on learning how to read, along with developing more rigor in reading skills, writing has received significantly less classroom instruction time (Miller & McCardle, 2010; Nagin, 2006; National Writing Project, 2003). This deficiency of writing instruction time may be correlated to the scarcity of writing research, in particular to students writing using graphica as a scaffold (Bitz, 2010). As students continue to struggle with writing proficiency, providing an opportunity to use semiotic tools such as drawings and other images can support students

working to communicate understanding and meaning in their writing (Bitz, 2010; Lenters & Winters, 2013; Maliszewski, 2013).

In the early years of formal education, both writing and drawing are acceptable forms of expression that allow students to represent what they see both internally and externally (Albers & Harste, 2007; Bitz, 2010; Calkins, 1994; Walmsley, 2008). As students gain mastery of the written word, removing the visual elements accepted early on as a scaffold (Vygotsky, 1978) moves students one step closer to a text-centric communication medium (Bitz, 2010). However, visual elements are not simply a scaffold, but a credible mode that communicates meaning and provides levels of depth when combined with the text on the page (Albers & Harste, 2007; Hendriksen & Kress, 2012; Jewitt & Kress, 2003). According to Bitz (2010), "Creating comics enables students to retain creativity in the writing process while reinforcing all of the basic writing skills that teachers aim to instill" (p. 52). At the national testing level, instruction for the NAEP writing assessment acknowledges the value of images to support thinking as the development of ideas as students are encouraged to draw a picture or a diagram during the planning phase of writing (Figure 1).

Summary of the Review of Literature

As the concept of becoming literate has continued to evolve, with it is the awareness of what educators must do to support the population of students they serve. As students are immersed in the multimodal experiences and tools of the 21st century, teachers continue to evolve their pedagogy to ensure students can proactively learn and communicate using the tools and modes which extend beyond printed words on the page (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001; Nagin, 2006; Walsh, 2010).

Figure 1. A planning brochure from an NAEP writing assessment. The brochure encourages drawing as an acceptable form of developing ideas during the prewriting phase. Adapted from *The Nation's Report Card: Writing 2007* (NCES 2008–468), by D. Salahu-Din, H. Persky, and J. Miller, 2008, p. 28.

While reading and writing are interconnected skills, the amount of time spent in the classroom on writing continues to challenge educators, and, as such, students, in particular boys, continue to struggle in mastering these most basic, yet critical skills (Nagin, 2006; NCES, 2012b; National Writing Project, 2003). Research on how boys process information suggests that learning may be more meaningful for both reading and writing when using multiple modes such as text and images to communicate (Gurian, 2005; Gurian & Stevens, 2004; Sax, 2005).

As the awareness of how to define literacy progresses, the use of multimodal

resources that support the use of images to scaffold comprehension and promote expression of ideas in the classroom is becoming more commonplace (Bell, 2007; Frey & Fisher, 2008; Olshansky, 2008). Visual literacy is recognized as a critical skill for students to possess, as the expectation grows for readers and writers to make sense by navigating fluently through text that fully integrates meaning using images with equal stature (Burmark, 2008).

Much of the research on the use of graphica such as comics and graphic novels, while questioned in the past, supports the integration of text and images as a meaningful way to process thinking and express ideas. This medium provides support in becoming a more literate citizen, allowing students to process meaning and communicate understanding at a deeper level (Bitz, 2010; Lenters & Winters, 2013; Maliszewski, 2013). While research has demonstrated that graphic novels are an effective resource for improving reading comprehension, there is limited research on its application to support the development of student writing.

Based on the research explored in this literature review, the use of graphica warrants additional investigation as a multimodal tool to scaffold writing skills for students. The researcher predicted that students engaged in an afterschool reading program that uses graphica and storyboarding as a support in the drafting stage of the writing process will demonstrate more motivation and engagement as they write and include descriptive vocabulary in their final writing pieces.

Research Questions

The purpose of this focused ethnography was to determine if participation in a series of afterschool workshops using a graphic novel-based activity influences the

writing and engagement of fifth grade boys in an urban school setting. Qualitative coding measures were used to evaluate the data to determine if creating graphic storyboards during the prewriting process affected the engagement and motivation of fifth grade boys to write. This study also explored the effects of this process on the use of descriptive vocabulary and the amount of words written in the final written piece. Qualitative data, in the form of observations, independent surveys, open-ended interviews, and focus groups, were used to understand the students' perspective on the effect the workshops had on their engagement in the writing process as well as on their motivation to write. In addition, pre and post-writing samples were collected to evaluate if the graphic novel format used in the drafting process affected the frequency and characteristics of descriptive vocabulary usage in the final writing piece. The use of quantitative survey data in this ethnography was to support and inform the qualitative results.

To achieve this purpose, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affect the writer self-perception of fifth grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program?

2. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affect the motivation to write of fifth grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program?

3. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, influence the use of descriptive vocabulary in the narrative writing of fifth grade boys?

An experimental design was used to respond to these questions. An after school writing program was offered to fifth grade boys who were underperforming on the state-mandated assessment of English language arts (ELA) to improve their self-perception as

a writer, along with their motivation to write. Qualitative data in the form of

observations, surveys, interviews, and focus group responses were used to address

research questions 1 and 2. Quantitative data were collected to support the observational

and conversational data. Additionally, all student participants completed a pre and post-

survey and interview questions, which were modified with permission of the authors, to

cover topics of writing motivation and awareness of the graphic novel medium. Modified

wording to the MRP-R were submitted to content and survey experts at the university to

safeguard that internal validity was held.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study was designed to understand if the use of graphic novels in a school setting can influence the motivation to write and the quality of language used in student writing. Focused ethnographic research methods were engaged to better understand if alternative strategies of expression had an effect on the participating students' approach to writing as well as any influences they may have had on the outcomes.

Research Design

Ethnography is an approach to qualitative research that collects, describes, analyzes, and interprets the practices of a culture-sharing group through observations and/or engagement. It is the job of the ethnographic researcher to describe a culture of people as they learn about them and from them (Roper & Shapira, 2000; Spradley, 1979/2016). Ethnographic research has broad applications that can concentrate on sizeable groupings such as a large tribe studied over extended periods, or can be as narrow as a nuclear family with one child during a relatively brief period (Creswell, 2015). Researchers can utilize ethnography in education as a means to understand experiences district-wide as effectively as within a classroom setting focusing on a small population of struggling students, seeking to understand how they engage in the learning environment and experience successes and failures in the process of learning (Putney, Green, & Dixon, 2016).

One subcategory of ethnographic research is focused ethnography (FE). Although FE is an extension of ethnography, specifically social ethnography, there are explicit differences that supported the use of FE as a more appropriate methodology for this study. Focused ethnography research is suited for understanding the actions of a smaller

grouping studied for a shorter period (Knoblauch, 2005). Within an FE study, the

researcher typically engages in the observer-as-participant role and seeks to understand a

specific question that is limited to a narrow topic of inquiry (Higginbottom, Pillay, &

Boadu, 2013; Knoblauch, 2005). Because of the brevity of time in the current study,

technology such as recording devices was used to collect intense data; this allowed the

researcher to be immersed in interviews and inquiry with participants.

For this study, qualitative data in the form of observations, open-ended

interviews, and focus groups, along with quantitative data in the form of coded work and

surveys from the participants, were collected and analyzed to understand and answer the

following research questions:

1. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affect the

writer self-perception of fifth grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program?

2. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affect the

motivation to write of fifth grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program?

3. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, influence the

use of descriptive vocabulary in the narrative writing of fifth grade boys?

Participants

Upon receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the

researcher contacted the principal of the selected school to explain the study and obtain

permission to conduct the research with members of the school community. The school

selected for this study was a magnet school located in a large urban public school district

in the midwestern United States. The specialty focus of this magnet school is as a

fundamental school, which establishes a highly structured work environment, utilizing a

back-to-basics curriculum and emphasizing traditional teaching methods in core content

areas. Unlike a neighborhood school that admits all children within its specified

boundaries, as a magnet, this school requires an application and approval process before

admission into the program. The school has 463 students enrolled, and employs 26 full-

time teachers, with an average 19:1 student to teacher ratio. The racial makeup of the

student body is 90.2% African American, 5.6% bi-racial, and 3.2% White. The socio-

economic profile reported 87% of enrolled students receive a free or reduced lunch, based

on family income reported. Overall, the school received a 63% achievement score for the

2015-2016 school year, which categorizes the school with a grade of "D" (Ohio School

Report Cards, 2016). There are 52 fifth grade students, 24 of whom are boys.

  The participants included in this research study were randomly selected by the

fifth grade language arts teachers employed at the school where the workshop was

conducted. An information letter for the parents/guardians of potential candidates

regarding the study (Appendix A), along with a parent/guardian consent letter (Appendix

B) were sent to the families of participants who met the following guidelines: (a) male,

(b) enrolled in fifth grade for the 2016-2017 school year, and (c) qualified to receive free

or reduced lunch. In addition, fifth grade students who participated in this study were

determined to be at-risk academically, based on their 2015-2016 fourth grade ELA

assessment score, which incorporated both a reading and writing component. In addition,

the researcher provided an informational letter written in age-appropriate language for the

potential participants (Appendix C).

Procedures

  According to Knoblauch (2005), a focused ethnography is a bounded system over

a condensed period. During this period, data collection strategies are intensely focused through recorded interviews and observations using technology, which is transcribed and analyzed following the sessions. The afterschool workshop took place over the course of a six-week period. Participants attended daily sessions for one hour and 15 minutes each day, four afternoons a week. Data collection took place at the beginning and end of the study through participation in a survey and an interview; responses of these experiences were used to explore specific ideas in the focus group. Throughout the study, observations took place through audio recordings and one-on-one interactions between the researcher and participants. A writing sample was also collected from each participant at the beginning and end of the six-week program.

Each week the participants met with the researcher in a workshop format, utilizing a curriculum developed by the researcher. There was a focused topic each week to help guide participants progressively through the process of using self-generated graphica to inform their writing (Table 1). The activities developed originated from experiences described in texts written by Bakis (2012), Bitz (2010), Bowkett and Hitchman (2012), Carter (2007), Cary (2004), Essley (2008), Frey and Fisher (2004), McCloud (1993), and Thompson (2008). Some of the explicit activities from these resources were age/grade level appropriate, while others were modified to meet the specific needs of the target population, based on time restrictions of the study and interests of the participants in the study.

Table 1

Planned Workshop Schedule

Week	Topic	Lesson Plan	Resources
1	Welcome	• Welcome circle activity: Community building, establishing routines • Baseline assessment and survey • Participants receive writer's notebooks to set up and personalize • Participants complete preassessments: writing, questionnaires, and interviews	Assessment Survey, Questionnaire Blank writers notebooks
2	Graphic novel introduction	• Introduction to graphica, graphic novel features, and descriptive vocabulary • Interpreting graphica • Deriving descriptive words from images • Exploring visual vocabulary	Writer's notebooks Selected texts and individual panel images
3	The writing process: Drafting process	• Writing process, emphasizing planning/drafting phase • Integrating storyboards as a tool for drafting a piece of writing	Writer's notebooks Storyboards examples and blanks
4	Storyboards	• Using storyboards during the drafting process to tell the story, drawings to include visual information such as mood, tone, setting, action • Use of literature circle format to develop peer-to-peer editing	Writer's notebooks Storyboards
5	Transferring visual communication to text	• Using developed storyboards as a springboard to create a written narrative • Peer editing and writing conferences	Writer's notebooks Storyboards
6	Wrap up	• Participants complete postassessments: writing, questionnaires, and interviews • Celebration of growth • Teacher feedback	Assessment Survey, Questionnaire

Each workshop session employed the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) model developed by Pearson and Gallagher (1983) and was informed by the work of Vygotsky (1978). In the GRR model, the teacher provides explicit instruction through the model lesson to demonstrate the key underpinnings of concepts and then provides the scaffold to gradually transfer responsibility to students as they demonstrate readiness. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development provided the framework for the GRR as the teacher releases responsibility to the students while providing a scaffold to support learning with the *I Do, We Do, You Do* structure of each lesson. The format of each daily session in this study included a warm-up activity that supported the lesson for the session, a brief mini-lesson of the focused topic, an opportunity for participants to explore the concept independently or with peers, and then a debriefing period at the end of each session.

Data Collection

An ethnographer's role is to describe a culture by learning through its people, "to be taught by them" (Spradley, 1979/2016, p. 4). For this study, data were collected through observations and engagement in surveys, interviews, focus group, and collection of work samples.

The Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS) was developed as a variation of the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS), a validated system to measure literacy motivation and engagement (Bottomley, Henk, & Melnick, 1998). Based on Bandura's (1977) theory of perceived self-efficacy, the WSPS supports inquiry regarding a child's perception of his/her writing ability. The instrument measures a writer's perception of their writing ability through the following factors: (a) general progress (GPR), (b) specific progress

(SP), (c) observational comparison (OC), (d) social feedback (SF), and (e) psychological states (PS) (Bottomley et al., 1998). Participants took the 37-question survey initially and responses then were explored for deeper understanding during the interview.

The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) was published in 1996 as an instrument to better understand ways to support and shape a student's motivation to read, and therefore improve outcomes in achievement (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1996). Originally developed with language appropriate for the kindergarten to sixth grade population, the tool incorporates both an independent survey and conversational interview questions to better explore the deeper aspects of what motivates students as readers (Gambrell et al., 1996). Recognizing the differences between the adolescent learner and the younger learners in an elementary school setting, individuals seeking to better understand the needs of middle and secondary school students revised the MRP in 1997 to better reflect the reading habits, attitudes, and motivation of adolescents (Pitcher et al., 2007). The Adolescent Motivation to Read Profile (AMRP) was developed using current research on adolescent learners to provide support to teachers in determining how to better support the unique needs of teenage learners and to better understand their reading habits both in and out of school. In 2013 the original MRP was revised to The Motivation to Read Profile-Revised (MRP-R) to reflect the changes in teaching and learning, based on current research and the changing needs of 21st century learners (Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013). The MRP-R includes a 20-question survey that measures student's self-concept as a reader and their value of reading and a set of interview questions, written as a conversational opportunity to explore responses from the survey. For this study, the MRP-R survey and interview questions (Appendix D)

were modified, with permission of authors (Appendix E) to cover topics of writing motivation and awareness of the graphic novel medium. Revisions to the MRP-R were reviewed by content and survey experts to ensure that internal validity was maintained. Both the survey and the interview questions were administered to better understand the individual participant's stance on writing. The survey component was administered independently within a whole group setting, and the interview questions were utilized during a one-on-one conversation between the researcher and each participant.

In addition to the survey and interview, participants were observed using field notes by the researcher. According to Knoblauch (2005), due to the relatively brief nature of a focused ethnography with intensive data collection periods, technology in the form of audio recordings should be utilized to gather multiple vantage points of student engagement within the setting. The use of audio recordings was determined to be the most effective medium, as video recording equipment can be a distraction with the potential to yield inauthentic behaviors. Participant interviews were recorded then transcribed and coded by the researcher.

Writing samples also were collected at the beginning and end of the study to better understand if the use of graphica influenced the descriptive vocabulary choices participants included in their writing. These samples were analyzed by coding the data to understand if the use of graphica in the prewriting process affected the quality of descriptive word choices in the final writing piece. In addition, these data were supported by the number of descriptive words used in the final writing piece along with the total number of words written.

Chapter 4: Results

Concerns regarding students' diminished ability to express thoughts and ideas through writing are demonstrated on standardized national literacy tests as well as in daily classroom practices. While graphic novels have demonstrated value in developing reading comprehension, there is a dearth of research exploring the value they may add to support student writing. This focused ethnography sought to determine if participation in a series of afterschool workshops using a graphic novel-based activity influenced the motivation and engagement of fifth grade boys in an urban school setting to write. Further, this study sought to determine if the visual representations created in the drafting stage of writing influenced the word choices students made in their final writing product. The six-week study took place in an afterschool workshop that met Monday through Thursday, for one hour and 15 minutes each day. During this study, participants developed a visual draft of their story in a storyboard format that incorporated graphic novel features. Participants then used the storyboards to complete their final narrative writing piece.

Student Participants

The participants for this study were enrolled in a public school with a designation as a magnet school, which is a school that provides a specialized focus with the intention of attracting a diverse population. The focus for this magnet school is fundamental education, which emphasizes a traditional, back-to-basics approach to education. The eight subjects chosen for this study were randomly selected by the fifth grade language arts teachers employed at the school and were voluntarily enrolled in the after-school enrichment program where the workshop was conducted. The eight participants selected

met the following guidelines: (a) male, (b) enrolled in fifth grade for the 2016-2017 school year, and (c) qualified for free or reduced lunch, which in this setting identifies these students as being economically disadvantaged. In addition, fifth grade participants were determined to be at-risk academically, based on their 2015-2016 fourth grade ELA assessment score, which incorporates both a reading and writing component. Participants were intrigued with becoming an author and a discussion about writers having pen names led to the each boy creating their own pseudonyms used in this dissertation as their pen name.

Mi'Kel. Mi'Kel is a 10-year-old African American male, who was present for 20 of the 22-day afterschool workshop, missing only two days due to the flu. Mi'Kel is a quiet and serious student who responds thoughtfully, with a measured and gentle tone. Mi'Kel stated that he sometimes writes in his spare time, inspired by his mother and grandmother. He believes that he is creative with his personal writing, but thinks his school writing needs to improve in the areas of penmanship and spelling. Throughout the six-week study, Mi'Kel was dedicated to his work and was rarely observed in off-task activities; even in transitions, he would pick up one of the graphic novels provided to read or skim for insights.

Jaren. Jaren is an 11-year-old African American male, who was present for 14 of the 22-day afterschool workshop, missing time primarily due to family responsibilities when he was required to escort his kindergarten-aged sibling home and provide afterschool care. These absences occurred primarily in the last two weeks of the study when participants were working on their personal stories. Jaren is an earnest and thoughtful student who always has a smile on his face. He takes his work seriously and

often would remind others to be respectful if they got off task and were causing distractions. When the researcher was collecting demographics for each participant at the end of the study, the teacher disclosed that Jaren had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that included expressive language goals in writing. Jaren sees himself as a writer and shared that he often listened to others playing outside and thought about how he could include the people and the scenarios in stories he would like to write. He shared that he likes to write outside of school, but sometimes his stories "don't make any sense."

Antonio. A 10-year-old African American male, Antonio was present for 17 of the 22-day afterschool workshop. Antonio came to the group confident and enthusiastic about being a writer and "drawer." He shared that his family and friends consider him a great writer and poet. As the weeks continued, his enthusiasm waned slightly as the writing exercises challenged him to stretch beyond the basics he had previously mastered. Antonio hit a block midway through the workshop and stopped creating original work, and instead spent time tracing pictures from books and making up new story lines for tracings. He shared that he found the challenges the group was presenting too difficult, and he preferred the writing he was used to. Antonio seemed receptive to the growth mindset activities during week four and five, as the group shared areas where they were feeling challenged and the inspiration to meet the challenges.

Bob. Bob is a 10-year-old Caucasian male who was present for 20 of the 22-day afterschool workshop, missing only two days due to illness. Bob is a reserved person, but when he shared his work and ideas he revealed that he is quite precocious and humorous. He is confident in his writing abilities but expressed that he does not enjoy writing. He shared that he does not engage in writing outside of school and his goal in school is to see

how quickly he can "get it over with." Bob shared he finds school writing boring and "can usually get through a five-paragraph essay in about ten minutes," but that he needed to work on his handwriting.

Darnell. Darnell, as a 10-year-old African American male, was present for 18 of the 22 -day afterschool workshop, missing occasionally due to illness or family requirements. Darnell is a soft-spoken and respectful participant who shared his thoughtful insights with a sweet smile. He shared that he did not like school writing as, "it is just copying ideas out of books and my hand gets tired." He shared that he is good at poetry because it is short and that he has good penmanship. While Darnell began with a little reluctance, he soon warmed up to the ideas and information he learned about graphic novels and how to use pictures to tell a story. He quickly embraced features of the graphic novels and how to use them in his images, but remained hesitant with his drawings. Like Antonio, he experienced some challenges halfway through the workshop and chose to trace images from books and make them fit into his original storylines. However, with coaching, Darnell worked through his challenges, and during the final weeks was typically the last student to stop writing and pack up his work.

Ya'mi. Ya'mi is a 10-year-old African American male who was present for 14 of the 22-day afterschool workshop. He dropped out midway through the fifth week of the study due to family responsibilities that prevented him from participating in any afterschool activities.

James. James, a soft spoken 10-year-old African American male, was present for 17 of the 22-day afterschool workshop. James is an extremely serious student who is enthusiastic about writing. He is very engaging and amiable with other members of the

group, but when it was time to work he worked independently and remained focused. He smiled often and nodded eagerly when discussing writing and enthusiastically added to the conversation about writing. James shared that while he liked writing, he is not confident that he is a good writer. Early in the study, James needed consistent reassurance that he was on the right track. He frequently conferred with the researcher to show his work asking questions such as, "Like this…?" or "How do you spell…?" "Can you look at this? This is where I am so far…" During the final weeks of the study, James's confidence grew and he required less encouragement and direction. The last few weeks of the study, James conferred only during the regular sessions requested by the researcher, and was always eager to share his work and insights with other writers.

Niko. Niko, a 10-year-old African American male, was present for 17 of the 22-day afterschool workshop. Niko was unable to attend the first week of the workshop, which accounted for most of his absences. Niko was the most reluctant of all participants, stating that he does not like writing because no one is ever able to read his handwriting. He stated that the only thing he does well in as a writer is his knowledge and use of punctuation. During the first few weeks of the workshop, Niko needed to be regularly monitored and reminded to re-engage, as he was consistently off task and typically creating distractions for others. The researcher worked closely with him, conferencing with him twice as often as other participants, to ensure he was making progress. During conferences, Niko would sit quietly and wait to be told the next steps. Slowly, Niko took ownership of his writing and came to conferences ready to explain his work and share his plans for next steps. By week five, Niko was more engaged and wrote with focus and determination, stopping only to confer with the researcher.

Description of Data Collection Setting

The workshop took place in a small community on the outskirts of a large city in the midwestern United States. While the school is located outside of the major downtown area, it is included in the larger school district that serves over 35,000 students, within 56 school buildings, across 91 square miles. The campus of the school hosting this workshop is set on a quiet, seven acre, tree-lined side street. The two-story red brick structure was built in 1903 and was architected in the Greek revival style. The workshop took place in an open side room inside the school library, which also houses the school computer lab. The side room has books lining the floor-to-ceiling shelves on two walls, with a white SmartBoard on the third wall. There are six tables in the room, with chairs to easily seat six people. The table formation remained separated to provide participants the opportunity to work independently, although it was easily able to accommodate student grouping of two or three. One table was dedicated to the writing materials participants would be using: pens, pencils, markers, a variety of 3" x 3" post-it notes, 8½" x 14" plain white paper, blank story outline paper, and lined paper. Another table was dedicated to a variety of age-appropriate graphic novels and simple drawing books for reading and reference materials. Mini-lessons were conducted using large chart paper attached to the SmartBoard as a demonstration area. The Writers' Club rules that were created by the participants were handwritten on a piece of large chart paper and posted on the SmartBoard (Figure 2).

Rules for Our Writers Group

Draw even if you are scared because no one will make fun of it.

Don't be scared.

Be helpful.

Always be creative.

Try your best all the time.

Don't be disrespectful to the teachers/students.

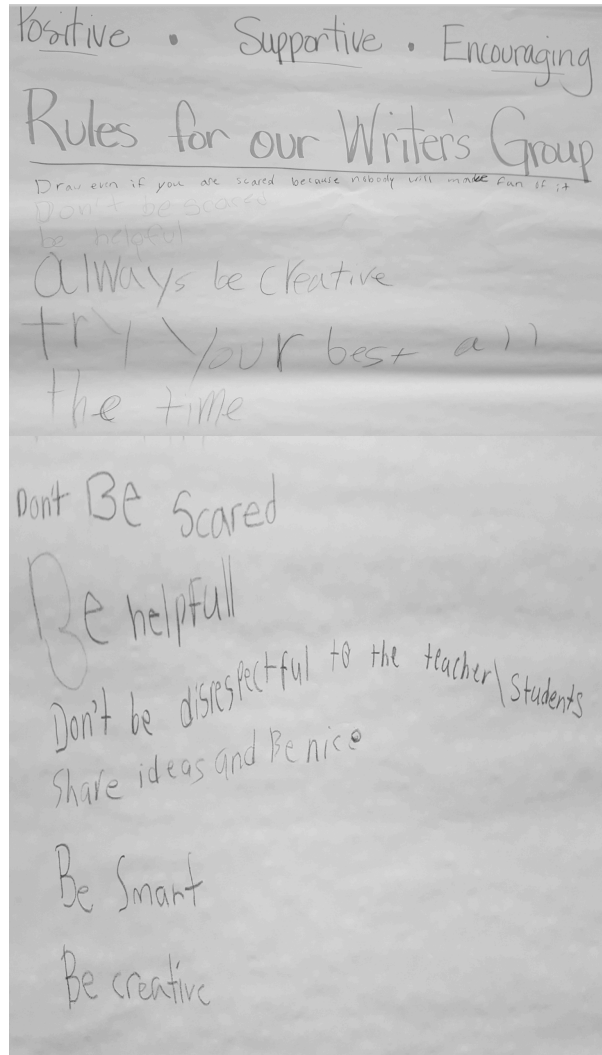Share ideas and be nice.

Be smart.

Be creative.

Figure 2. Writer's club rules.

Description of the Workshop Structure

The group of participants met each week Monday through Thursday, immediately after school, for one hour and 15 minutes, from 2:15 pm to 3:30 pm. The original plan

was to meet for a one-hour workshop each day; however, after the first week, the

participants shared they were hungry and finding it hard to concentrate, as their school

day began at 7:45 am and their lunch period was at 11 am. Beginning in week two,

snacks were provided and students were allocated 15 minutes to eat before the daily

workshop began.

Week 1. During week one, the student assent form (Appendix F) was carefully

discussed and signed by all participants. Participants independently completed the MRP-

W and WSPS, engaged in pre-study interviews, and completed a pre-study writing

sample. Each participant chose a writing prompt from the three provided and was

instructed to use the writing process to complete an essay on their chosen prompt. No

other instructions were provided.

The researcher allowed each participant to pick out a composition book as their

writer's notebook for the duration of the study. During this first week, participants were

encouraged to freely peruse the assortment of graphic novels and variety of graphica

materials provided as a springboard for dialogue. Books and resources on how to create

simple line drawings and cartoons were provided and participants were encouraged to

explore and experiment. Discussions were guided each day to engage participants in

thinking and sharing their feelings toward the materials and their experiences as they read

the graphica resources and practiced drawing. During the interviews, a number of

participants expressed that they would like to extend the workshop experience, but did

not have materials to collect their writing and drawings at home. At the end of the first

week, the researcher provided an additional writer's notebook for participants to capture

additional ideas at home, as the notebooks for the study needed to stay in the researcher's

possession. The researcher guided discussions on the format of a writers' club and the importance of all taking ownership for their independent as well as group work (Smith, 1988). Discussions about respectful learning environments followed and participants were provided with blank chart paper to establish the behavior expectations they thought were reasonable and respectful for a good working environment. At the end of the first week, the group discussed and finalized their guidelines for The Writers' Club.

Week 2. The topic of week two focused on features unique to graphic novels and graphica materials. Since participants indicated during the preinterview that their teachers do not use graphic novels in class, this week was dedicated to understanding how to read and interpret the variety of graphica materials, which included graphic novels, comic books, and comic strips, that would be used for the workshop. Together the group read the graphica material and conducted small book-talk sessions to interpret the meaning they were making and to justify their interpretation of the images. The participants thought deeply about their interpretations and listened to varying perspectives. This introspection provided fertile ground for discussion about technique, craft, and a writer's awareness and consideration of a reader's point of view. Specifically, features and meanings highlighted were panel, frame, gutters, page, speech/thought bubbles, narration box, captions, tone, and color. Utilizing the GRR model, mini-lessons were kept to 15-20 minutes, and participants were released to begin crafting their comics, comic strips, and comic books. At the end of the week, writers were provided the opportunity to share their work and receive feedback. In keeping with the spirit of the guidelines the group created in week one, feedback given was constructive and reflected participants' growing knowledge of graphica and how to use the features to communicate meaning. Comments

centered on general statements such as, "I like how he added those lines. He really didn't

need to add words because the faces really show how the character feels with those

lines."

Week 3. During the preinterview, participants were unable to identify what the

writing process is or steps to writing; therefore, week three centered on the writing

process and vocabulary development. Mini-lessons emphasized elements of a story, a

writer's role, and the importance of a rich vocabulary. Familiar stories such as *The Three*

*Little Pigs (*Marshall, 1989), *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Galdone, 1973), *Jack and the*

Beanstalk (Galdone,1974), and *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* (Buehner & Buehner,

2007). were used for multiple exercises throughout the week as a tool for participants to

analyze pictures, practice building an outline, and identify story elements. In addition, an

emphasis was placed on the steps and importance of the writing process: prewrite, draft,

revise, edit, and publish. At the end of week three, the midpoint in the study, each

participant completed a midpoint questionnaire so the researcher could offer

opportunities for reflection as well as gain a better understanding of how prepared the

individuals were for the next phase, which would require each participant to accept more

independence as a writer. While everyone expressed an interest in creating their stories

and gaining more independence, a few expressed concerns about their ability to draw.

Week 4. The beginning of week four marked a shift in the daily format to a

writer's workshop model, where insights gathered from individual conferences with the

writers determined the topic of the small and whole group mini-lessons. These lessons

were condensed to an average of five minutes and focused on scaffolding skill

development based on individual needs. This format reinforced the independent work of

each writer as well as created small pairings where participants could provide support for each other. Participants were provided the opportunity to free write in their writer's notebook or begin outlining their story, and were enthusiastic about the opportunity to develop their individual ideas using the information from weeks two and three.

In addition to the new format, the researcher introduced a new concept of creating a storyboard after the pre-write outline (Appendix G). Following a particular structure, participants were shown how to expand on the traditional outline using panels to draw each part of the story, and then annotate each panel with bullet points using keywords. Independent writing conferences became more meaningful, as participants found the new format more challenging. Some observed that, while the drawing was enjoyable, it took much longer to complete. During one of the sharing sessions, Bob commented, "I used to be able to finish my whole story in like 15 minutes. The drawing part takes a lot longer, but the pictures help me remember details when I write." Niko shared, "I used to think writing took too much time. Now it's like, if you get to write what you really like, what you really want, it doesn't seem to take but a short amount of time. But, it really does takes much longer."

Daily conferences were an important part of each day as individual needs varied greatly depending on ability levels and confidence. The challenges created by learning the new format were frustrating for some who lacked confidence in their writing skills. Group discussions on day two of week four centered on the challenges of writers as creators. Some participants expressed concerns about their drawings not being "good enough." The group reminded each other of the rule: *Draw even if you are scared because no one will make fun if it.* The researcher listened without participating in the

exchanges, as the writers were supporting each other and sharing how they overcame some of their fears. Once the interactions within the group were completed, the researcher shared her own experiences about sometimes feeling intimidated to write.

Week 5. After reflecting on the conversations at the end of the previous week, week five began with the researcher addressing the concepts of rigor and struggle, and how they relate to a challenging activity such as writing. Each participant received three post-it notes and asked to write a response on each one that finished the stem "When I was a baby, I couldn't do…." Then they were asked to put their notes on the board one at a time and discuss the challenges they undertook to master the particular skill they chose. Comments focused on ideas such as learning to walk, eating solid food, learning to ride a bike, etc. The group shared experiences and explained all of the steps they took along the way to reach proficiency in specific tasks, and the scaffolding that an adult, or more qualified other, provided. In the end, participants each took turns choosing one skill they mastered, followed by the steps they took to become proficient. Bob shared, "I used to not be able to ride a bike, but my dad helped me by running beside me until I could balance on my own, and now I can ride a bike easily." Then, individuals made statements centering on something they were worried about accomplishing, followed by the word *yet,* then a plan to master the skill. Darnell proudly proclaimed, "I can't draw faces yet, but when I keep practicing and learning from others, I will do it."

As participants continued to develop their storyboards, the focus of mini lessons emphasized the transition of images and keywords into sentences, then toward a final five-paragraph draft of writing. With each student in varying stages of writing, independent writing conferences were critical in supporting the individual needs of each

writer. As the researcher was frequently engaged in these one-on-one meetings, group members began to consult with each other for feedback and support.

      Week 6. The final week of the workshop was utilized for participants to continue their work on independent writing projects. The researcher continued to respond to questions as they arose, but primarily dedicated time to the collection of post data, which included each participant's completion of a writing sample, and providing adequate time for participants to complete the MRP-W and the WSPS. Follow-up interviews were conducted, along with a focus group on the final day.

      The first day of week six was dedicated to collecting post-study writing samples. As with the pre-study writing samples, participants were given the opportunity to choose a prompt from the three previously selected by the researcher. These prompts included similar wording and topics to the ones provided for the pre-study writing sample. Participants were then asked to write their essay using the format created during the study: outline, storyboard, draft. While all materials were available, no other instructions were provided.

Qualitative Findings

      With a deficiency in research on writing in the classroom juxtaposed with data on writing scores for fourth grade students indicating that over 70% remain at or below basic skill levels, this study sought to understand ways to improve writing outcomes and increase students' engagement as they become more capable writers. Based on the philosophical underpinnings of CHAT, this study explored the use of visual tools found in the imagery of graphic novels to help students improve as writers through motivation, engagement, and content. Graphic novels are recognized as a credible medium that

promotes the development of multifaceted reading comprehension skills and high student engagement. However, there is a lack of research on how this medium can be used as a tool to support writing, even though the use of drawing has been recognized as a strategy to focus attention, help construct ideas, and make thinking visible (Brooks, 2009). Research has shown that early in the writing process drawing is documented as an acceptable metacognitive and cultural tool that supports higher mental functions in children and provides a scaffold for communicating minute graphic details (Brooks, 2004, 2009; Everson, 1991; Levin & Bus, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978).

The following section addresses the findings of the study by examining the themes that emerged from the coded data for each question posed. Qualitative data were collected from observations, open-ended interviews, focus groups, student writing, and surveys. Quantitative data that informed the data gathered from the qualitative data were collected.

Research Question 1. The first research question guiding this study was to investigate *how drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affects the writer self-perception of fifth grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program.* Because how a child perceives their ability to complete a multifaceted task such as writing, the data from this question sought to understand how the drafting of a story using visual representations affected their belief and approach to complete such a complex task. Two major themes emerged from the data that supported a better understanding of the question: (a) confidence in writing skills and (b) self-efficacy in the craft of writing (Table 2).

Table 2

Themes for Research Question 1

Question 1	Theme	Subtheme
How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affect the writer self-perception of 5th grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program?	Confidence in writing skills	Perception of: • Ability/Mechanics • Stamina
	Self-efficacy in craft of writing	Quality of content Use of drawing as a strategy Thinking like a writer

Theme 1: Confidence in writing skills. Although most participants began the study with a positive view of writing and a variety of beliefs about themselves as a writer, most were aware that their writing skills were below what was considered grade level, based on the scores from the previous year's state test. During the preinterview, participants were asked to rate themselves as a writer, based on a scale of 1 to 10, and explain how they determined their self-assessed score. Individuals differentiated between their abilities in "school writing" and writing completed as a personal choice outside of school. In-school writing perceptions were based primarily on external feedback from parents and teachers and centered on the ability to master tasks and skills such as neatness, spelling, punctuation, and length of passage (Table 3). Personal writing was an activity that all perceived to be a satisfying experience and most shared that they enjoyed writing for pleasure outside of school.

Lack of stamina was also of concern as participants remarked that the goal was to complete the writing task as quickly as possible with a minimal amount of writing. The referring classroom teacher shared with the researcher that it was challenging for her to get the participants to write more than five simple sentences when assigning an essay or

narrative in class, and explained that many will write less.

Table 3

Preinterview Writing Self-Rating

Participant	Self-rating (1-10)		Justification
	Pre	Post	
1. Mi'Kel	8	10	Pre-rating: "I just don't write very much" Post-rating: "My ability to write longer, and sequence my story to it makes sense."
2. Jaren	4	9	Pre-rating: "My writing doesn't make sense" Post-rating: "Writing with the pictures is how I learned to write"
3. Antonio	9	10	Pre-rating: "My family and classmates say I am a good writer" Post-rating: "I just write more now"
4. Bob	5	8	Pre-rating: "I am not very neat and I only write 1 to 2 sentences when I do write" Post-rating: "Now I really think more about it and write a lot more"
5. Darnell	5	9	Pre-rating: "I can work on being neat and writing more. I also need to think about punctuation" Post-rating: "I know more about how using pictures will help with things like the story structure"
6. James	6	10	Pre-rating: "I don't know, I am just not very good" Post-rating: " I am writing more, and more stories, and getting better"
7. Niko	3	8	Pre-rating: "No one can read my handwriting, but I can" Post-rating: "What has changed in me is that I like writing more"

Bob. While Bob had confidence in his ability to write, he was not inspired and

therefore was disinterested in putting forth any effort. He shared, "I will try to get my

writing done in less than ten minutes, which is my record. Most of the time I write just

one sentence per paragraph, sometimes less." Midway through the study, Bob began to

craft his personal story through drawing and found the use of the post-it notes useful, as

he revised and continually added more details as his story progressed. Bob worked

independently throughout each session. During the post interview Bob shared his

awareness of his growth, "I have gotten used to writing more, and I know I am getting

stronger. It is good but is also the worst part because I can't stop, and when you write so

many words, it hurts your hands!"

Niko. Niko's experience with writing had been one of his biggest challenges in

school. Niko shared that he did not want to be in the study but that his mom told him he

had to participate. He did not begin the study until the last day of the first week and

missed many of the foundational experiences. While engaged in experiences and

interacting with the researcher, Niko rarely made eye contact or smiled. When asked to

rate himself as a writer and explain his rating, Niko stated he was a "3." When asked to

explain that rating, Niko looked only at his feet as he shrugged and shared, "Sometimes

when I do my homework, my mom says she can't read it, and I have to do it over. But I

can read it, so…yeah." During the first few weeks of the workshop, the researcher made

the decision to conference with Niko two or three times within the approximately 30-

minute independent work time, as typically he would get off task after 10 minutes of

work. Niko approached writing conferences with little to no affect and would not make

eye contact. When putting his work on the table, he would make statements like, "This is

all I have. I don't know what else to write" or some variation on that sentiment. During

these conferences, the researcher focused more on his drawings and the graphica features

he was adding to communicate his ideas. He was slowly introduced to the concept of

accompanying each panel with an additional post-it note with bullet points and keywords.

During the final two weeks of the workshop, Niko intensely focused on drafting his story

and writing his final piece. In the closing interview, he smiled and shared, "I used to

think writing took too much time, but now I think if you get to write what you really like, what you want to write, it doesn't seem to take but a short amount of time."

Theme 2: Self-efficacy in the craft of writing. Often teaching students how to craft a piece of their writing receives little attention in school, while there is a high emphasis placed on spelling and the mechanics. Without scaffolding opportunities for students to engage in crafting their writing, which include the refinement of word choice, voice, and story structure, among a variety of other higher-level skills, students can skip this part of the authoring cycle. Consequently, many may continue to focus on the more fundamental aspect of writing mechanics and miss the opportunity to master these more sophisticated aspects of writing that can elevate their view of themselves as an author.

During the study, daily mini-lessons were conducted with a specific emphasis on drawing to communicate and understanding the craft of writing, as a writer, to precisely convey meaning to the reader. Participants had a chance to analyze the work of graphic novelists and consider their intended meaning. They also had the opportunity to practice specific strategies using panels from wordless books and create their single-panel comics to share with each other. These opportunities established a higher level of rigor for the participants and were met with a great deal of enthusiasm as the participants began to recognize their growth and begin to view themselves as authors.

Mi'Kel. During the midpoint interview, Mi'Kel shared,

Drawing the picture before I write helps me to remember all the little details I want to add. Like, if you really don't know how to describe the setting or the background or what the characters look like, you can draw the picture first. Then you can look at the picture to better know how to explain to the reader.

By the end of the study, he further clarified the importance of the skill by expanding on how he uses it to craft his story, "As an author, I really have to think about what I want the reader to know. The drawings help you think about the words you need to choose to help give better descriptions for your reader."

James. James had a quiet strength in his passion for writing but struggled to gain confidence. He nodded eagerly when discussing writing and enthusiastically added to any conversations about being a writer and the craft of writing. However, the open-ended nature of working on his own writing independently seemed to challenge him. He would approach the researcher often between writing conferences with others and share what he had done as a means of searching for reassurance that he was on the right track. For James, conferences began to center on helping him to trust the storyboard outline he created. Probing questions prompted him to return to each panel and write about what the images were communicating to the reader. Helping James understand that he was *reading* the graphic images to *write* his story was a pivotal moment for him, as he began to see himself as the author of his own story. During the exit interview, James intimated that he was beginning to understand about the craft of writing as he considered his growth as a writer.When asked how his feelings about writing changed from the beginning of the study, James broadly smiled as he shared, "I used to think writing was a little easy, but now it is getting harder the more I know."

Participants' survey results. Participants completed two surveys and one interview question that addressed self-perception and how it pertains to writing. Grounded in Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, a student's growth connects to a belief in their ability to be successful.

WSPS. The Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS) was developed to assist educators working with students in grades 4 - 8 understand how they perceive their writing abilities in five major areas: general progress, specific progress, observational comparison, and social feedback (Bottomley et al., 1998). In the areas of general and specific progress, participants were asked questions to measure overall how they perceived their writing skills and abilities (Table 4). Although most showed growth in both the general and specific progress categories, progress was minimal; except for Jaren, all perceived their skills to be on the higher-end of average and higher in both the preassessment and postassessment. The observational comparison category centered on how students perceive their writing skills compared to the writing skills of their peers. All participants demonstrated an elevation in their perception of their writing abilities compared to the others; however, it was unclear if they viewed their peers as fellow members of The Writers' Club, or those in their grade level who were not participating in the study. The social feedback category evaluated how students perceive the view of others, such as peers, teachers, and family members, of their skills. The results of this category revealed that, again, most participants have the perception that the significant others in their lives are aware of their skill as a writer. Finally, in the physiological state category, which measures the physical sensations students experience as they write, only three participants perceived an improved feeling of comfort and calm as they engage in writing.

Table 4

Student Self-Evaluation on the Writer Self-Perception Scale (WSPS)

Participant	General progress (40)		Specific progress (35)		Observational comparison (45)		Social feedback (35)		Physiological states (30)	
	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post	pre	post
1. Mi'Kel	36	40	32	35	29	38	28	34	30	30
2. Jaren	17	40	23	35	19	40	18	30	20	26
3. Antonio	37	35	32	32	39	41	31	33	28	27
4. Bob	33	37	29	32	34	35	25	28	23	25
5. Darnell	39	40	34	35	41	44	30	29	28	27
6. James	39	40	33	32	27	30	29	33	30	30
7. Niko	36	39	30	35	27	40	20	18	23	25

MRP-R. The results from the WSPS were also supported by the Motivation to

Read Profile-Revised (MRP-R) that was modified, with permission of the authors, for

this study to include writing and topics pertaining to the use of graphic novels (Table 5).

The MRP-R encompasses a self-concept as a writer category as one component of

motivation, which is considered one element of self-perception. In this survey,

participants were asked questions to judge the belief in their writing abilities; the

responses indicate growth for most students.

Table 5

MRP-R (Modified)

Participant	Self-concept as a writer (40)	
	Pre	Post
1. Mi'Kel	32	32
2. Jaren	24	33
3. Antonio	34	39
4. Bob	29	27
5. Darnell	28	38
6. James	34	38
7. Niko	27	37

Overall, data collected from multiple sources for the participants in this study indicate that drafting a story using graphic novel features as a tool improved the participants' self-perception as a writer. Using visual representations to record their stories in the earliest phase of the writing process allowed students to symbolize, as Bob explained, "the movies in our head" by representing the visual imagery in their minds. When teaching reading for comprehension in an elementary school, visualization of a story is a common strategy implemented to assist students transitioning from picture books to print-centric text, so it appeared to be a natural fit for the participants in this study. The use of this strategy as it related to writing supported the two major themes that emerged from the data, which was the participant's confidence in their writing skills and developing a growing self-efficacy in the craft of writing.

Research Question 2. The second research question guiding this study was to understand *how drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affects the motivation to write of fifth grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program.* The topic of motivation is ever-present on educators' minds, as teachers strive to create learning experiences that are engaging, build confidence, and advance student skills. While reading research in schools has demonstrated the positive relationship between student motivation and performance, the data from this question sought to understand if drafting stories in a graphic novel format motivated students to write. Two major themes emerged from the data that supported a better understanding of the question: (a) initiative and persistence and (b) improved self-confidence in writing abilities (Table 6).

Table 6

Themes for Research Question 2

Question 2	Theme	Subtheme
How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affect the motivation to write of 5th grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program?	Initiative and persistence	• Engagement • Enjoyment
	Perception of self as an author	• Knowledge of writer's role • Awareness of writing process

   Theme 1: Initiative and persistence. For most students, writing is perceived as an unpleasant activity that requires too much time and is contrived to produce predetermined responses. This can often be the perception of many teachers, as getting students to produce cohesive writing pieces can be a challenge and a source of great frustration for many. In schools, a writing assignment often is connected to a reading passage as a method of assessing reading comprehension, rather than an opportunity for a student to process ideas and express original thinking.

   During this six-week study, participants explored the idea of what a writer needs to know to convey their thoughts to the reader effectively and expressed their views on academic and personal writing. Participants referred to "school writing" as a task to complete quickly, with a preset list of expectations that are judged and carry the weight of a grade. Personal writing, while viewed as a more preferred mode of writing, was often not done unless it was a special occasion such as a letter or note they wrote for a family member.

   The writer's notebooks became a critical tool for participants to interact with, and picking up their notebook was the first stop each boy made upon entering the library each

day. During breaks in activities or free writing time, participants would use their writer's

notebooks to continue stories or practice drawing activities. Writer's notebooks were not

to be taken home, but remained with the researcher for evaluative purposes as well as to

ensure they would always be available for the workshop. During the second week of the

workshop, there were three separate incidences of participants smuggling their writer's

notebooks into their backpacks and taking them home. When the researcher inquired,

they explained that they ran out of time and had more ideas to write/draw. They were

concerned that if they did not write it out quickly, they would forget their ideas. At the

end of the second week, the researcher provided each participant with an additional

writer's notebook to keep at home when they needed to write. Mi'Kel requested to take

his original writer's notebook home one more time, "to copy my stories into this (home)

one, so I can continue where I leave off from this one (from study notebook)."

 Engagement. For the writing sample, the researcher provided the participants the

choice of three writing prompts for both the preassessment and the postassessment. They

were given the simple directions, "Please write a narrative essay responding to just one of

these prompts. Remember to use a five-paragraph essay format. Make sure to complete

the prewriting process before you write your story." Based on the data, participants

showed a significant level of self-initiated engagement in their writing. Throughout the

assessment, participants would occasionally pause as they wrote to shake their writing

hand and massage their palms, as they began to feel cramping in their hand from the

intense exercise. James explained, "Writing is the best part and the worst part. You have

to use so many words because your pictures helped you because you write more with

pictures. Then when you write more words, your hand feels like it is going to break!"

While the total writing time in the pre and postassessment were, in a number of cases, close in time spent (Table 7), the significant change was attributed to the in-depth planning time.

Table 7

Time in Minutes to Complete Assessment Writing Samples

	Preassessment	Postassessment			Difference
Participant	Total time	Planning	Writing	Total	Total
1. Mi'Kel	27	63	47	110	+83
2. Jaren	35	75	72	147	+112
3. Antonio	24	107	34	141	+117
4. Bob	12	30	17	47	+35
5. Darnell	31	65	30	95	+64
6. James	37	60	19	79	+42
7. Niko	26	35	32	67	+41

Participants drew detailed yet relatively simple drawings that represented the story and the details as they saw them from their visualization. This time lingering in the writing process and thinking about supporting details also seemed to carry forward to the amount they wrote (Table 8).

Table 8

Amount of Words Written to Complete Assessment Writing Samples

	Preassessment	Postassessment	Difference
Participant	# of words	# of words	# of words
1. Mi'Kel	132	180	+48
2. Jaren	31	433	+402
3. Antonio	125	200	+74
4. Bob	29	265	+236
5. Darnell	176	161	-15
6. James	149	164	+15
7. Niko	36	128	+92

Demotivation and engagement. Motivation, derived from the Latin root *movere,*

meaning to move, is an integral part of engaging students in the learning process. Students who are innately motivated find pleasure in the task they are involved in and have higher levels of initiative in their work (Strongman, 2013). While motivation is related to one's self-efficacy, students can become demotivated quickly when they believe a task is unattainable. As a result, they may respond by failing to persevere at a challenging task and engage in distractive behaviors (Falout, 2012).

While Antonio and Darnell entered the study highly motivated and confident about their aptitudes as writers, they began to experience challenges as they perceived deficiencies in their ability to draw. Instead of using the simplistic drawing resources provided to learn techniques, both participants started tracing pictures from published works and adapting their stories to fit the images. This approach seemed to help conceal their perceived deficit in their artistic representations and allowed them to re-engage in writing, the task in which they were most confident.

The researcher worked independently with each participant to better understand the role of drawing in this activity, as opposed to the role drawing plays in the creation of a refined graphic novel. Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* books were used to establish that simple line drawings can be equally as effective at communicating meaning to a reader. While Darnell was able to apply these ideas and re-engage in the drawing and writing process, Antonio continued to struggle with issues of competence. Over the remainder of the study, Antonio requested the researcher help create an image for him on two occasions, and twice asked other participants to draw objects for his storyboard. In contrast, Darnell continued working on his storyboard, satisfied with his successful drawings, and independently re-engaged in the writing process.

Jaren. Jaren began the workshop by informing the researcher that, while he liked writing, he was not very good: "Sometimes my writing makes sense, but sometimes it doesn't." While Jaren stated early on that he always thought about writing, he did not feel he could ever be an author. He explained,

> Sometimes when I am outside playing, I just listen to all the things and see everything and hear everything the kids are saying. I try to think about ways I can remember it so I can make a story out of it. I think it is important to write it down right away. If I am outside, I may write it down with chalk. If I don't have anything to write with, I just keep saying it down over and over again.

Throughout the workshop, Jaren always entered with a smile, worked independently and up until the last call to clean up the materials. He was open and outspoken about how strongly he felt about writing and the stories he carries in his head, even though he lacked confidence as a writer. During the first few weeks, Jaren approached the researcher multiple times to show his work and gain reassurance. Initially, he would ask what the next steps were or how to spell a word. Through consistent reinforcement, Jaren's conferences evolved into an opportunity to show the work he completed, rather than asking for reassurance. When asked what his next steps were, he began to articulate his plans. He shared his excitement about the program, but was a little nervous about the next steps as he felt he was not good at drawing.

The researcher shared books that demonstrated simple illustration techniques to help students who were concerned about drawing feel more confident. Jaren took the resources provided and during the graphic novel week, he focused on his drawing techniques and how to draw simple characters. Jaren never traced, but meticulously

followed the simple step-by-step instructions for how to create animals and variations on

facial expressions (Figure 3). The work Jaren produced during the first two weeks

consisted of text only, and at the beginning of the third week, he asked if he could only

write using text for the rest of the workshop. The researcher talked with him about

stretching himself by risking to learn more, and that she believed that drawing might be a

way to help develop stronger descriptions in his writing. Initially, when he began

drawing, as he did with writing, Jaren brought each new picture to the researcher for

reassurance and regularly asked how much time until the end of the session for the day.

However, by the end of the third week Jaren became more self-reliant, and between his

daily writing conferences completed two full sheets on his own. During the midpoint

interview, Jaren stated, "Drawing pictures makes it easier to describe things and

remember what to write."
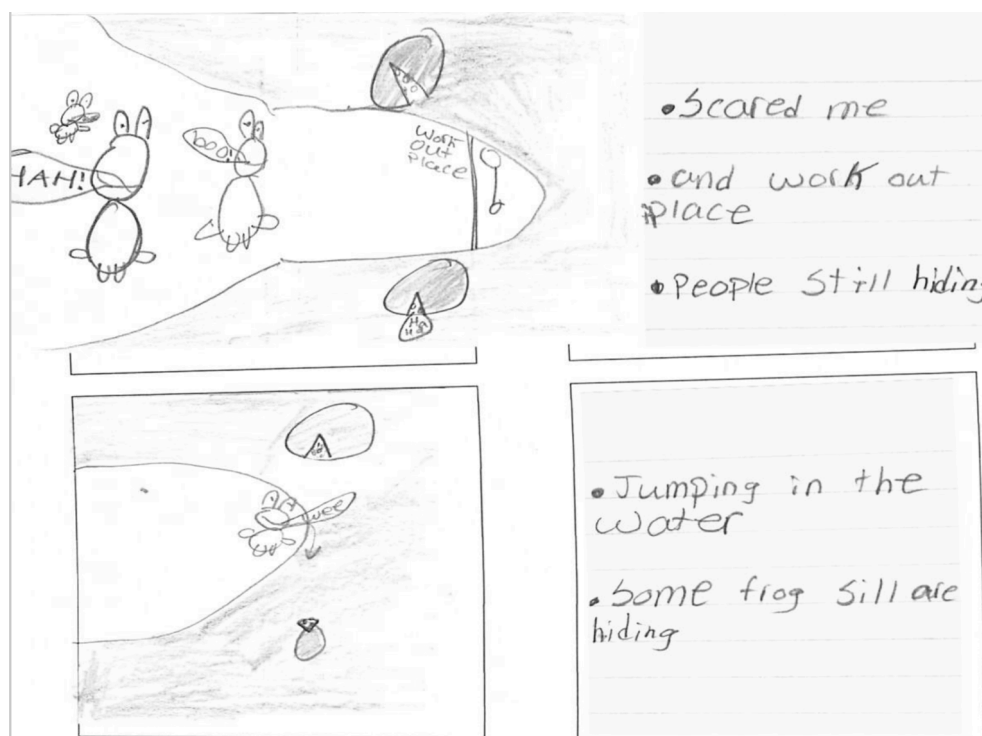
Figure 3. Jaren: drawing figures and expressions.

In the exit interview, when asked about the difference in his views on writing before the study and at the end, Jaren shared, "I used to think I would give up on writing and just write sloppy, but now I know I can do it without giving up. Now I care about it." Later in the interview, he specified what he was taking away: "

My favorite part was drawing, because when you draw, it helps you see what you were going to write, and seeing that helped you write. It also helped when you had to leave and come back. You could see where you were, even if it was two weeks later.

During the final week of the study, Jaren shared his excitement about completing his last writing sample. When asked about his excitement, he stated that he knew he was a good writer and "…wanted to just write." Jaren worked over three days without guiding or prompting. Twice he asked for help in choosing the perfect word that he could not quite produce. Information on time spent writing the final writing sample, along with the amount written, were indicators of Jaren's engagement and persistence, along with the quality of the writing. As noted in Table 8, Jaren's word count increased by over 400 words between pre and postassessment, showing incredible growth for a student with an IEP that included expressive language goal in writing, as evidenced in his pre and post-writing sample (Figure 4).

Niko. Niko found the task of writing to be unpleasant as the feedback he received from home and school reinforced the concept that he is not competent; his teacher also confided that Niko is "just lazy." Nikos's need for redirection early in the study gradually diminished over the first few weeks, and during the midpoint interview he shared: "Writing stories like this is easier, even though drawing the pictures the way you want

them to look is hard." He continued to share that he is beginning to think differently about writing as, "writing really helps me get my thoughts out."

By week five of the study, Niko approached each day with a smile. He adopted a confidence in his ability to tell his story, and his initiative to begin his writing at the onset of the session and to remain engaged with his writing continued to evolve. He approached each writing conference with a humble enthusiasm, prepared to show his writing and talk about his ideas and plans for next steps.

Prewriting sample

Post-writing sample

Figure 4. Jaren: writing samples.

In the last week of the study, Niko worked independently for two days on his final writing sample. While the time spent on the actual writing of the postassessment essay was similar to the preassessment essay, total time spent to complete the entire assignment increased by three times from the pre-writing sample collected. This growth was supported by the amount written between the pre and postassessment and demonstrated in the comparison of the initial and final written pieces (Figure 5).

Prewriting sample

Today I had a trip at school. I was really neroun my Frist trip in school. We are going to parkes fram we love the fram it was the funiest feild trip I ever went on. This is my story by

Post-writing sample

One Day I woke up. I was in a manshine I was so suprsie I New it was a mannich. It had 50 rooms. The tall predent Name Barck Obama. He was very Nice. He thank me. I shook His hand. I say He had a nice suit to Him. He say Thanks. I said By. and Then He Waved.

I see favite game, I love it I saw call of Duty, My game I always walted s far too. It is a Better game, I think Best of them.

Then me and my man was parking in the parkinx lot it was empeed. I went Down the pool Silde. It Irile. I love it. Next thing I know is am trying. the Bed going to sleep.

Figure 5. Niko: writing samples.

During the exit interview Niko was asked if drawing first influenced his writing; he shared, "Yes, I can look at the drawings and the details I was thinking, and then I can put that down on paper in words." In addition, Niko shared that, on a scale of 1 to 10, as a writer he now rated himself an 8, which was an increase from the rating of 3 he assigned himself at the beginning of the study. When questioned to what he attributed to this growth, Niko made direct eye contact with the researcher and stated, "What has changed in me is that I like writing more. And, I am able to write more words."

Theme 2: Perception of self as an author. The craft of writing extends far beyond the act of recording marks on paper. The fundamental action of composing a grammatically correct sentence, coupled with the correct use of spelling and punctuation, are skills that are essential to becoming a writer. However, writers must master more than the basics. Writers must have a sense of their voice; a mastery of language and precision in it's usage; an awareness of their metacognitive process; and a strong sense of the mood, tone, and plot of the story they will be telling. Even further, writers must remain mindful of their audience, ensuring the ability to communicate their intended ideas, all while allowing the reader an opportunity to make meaning as they transact with the text. The participants in this study explored these ideas of what it means to be a writer and embrace the challenges of this complex process that caused them to stretch far beyond the boundaries of "school writing."

Mi'Kel. From the first day of the study, Mi'Kel had an idea of the story he wanted to tell. He shared that he was always interested in possibly writing a television show, as he often thought about how he might change an ending of an existing show. During writing conferences early in the study, Mi'Kel thought that the story he might like to

explore was based on stories his grandfather told about his experiences in the war. During the third week, where the topic focused on the use of graphic novels and how the images and text features communicate meaning to the reader, Mi'Kel was focused on drawing the pictures for his stories. He spent time carefully considering the smallest of details in facial expressions and setting details as a way to communicate meaning. During sharing times, Mi'Kel would share his work and talk about the details he added, always receiving positive encouragement from his peers.

At the beginning of the study, Mi'Kel rated himself an 8 out of 10 as a writer. By the end, Mi'Kel changed his rating of himself as a writer from an 8 to a 10. He explained the change as "…my ability to write longer and sequence my story better." He shared that the importance of drawing the pictures before he wrote:

> The pictures help a lot because if you really don't know how to explain the setting, or the background, or what your character looks like, then you can draw the pictures first. Then you can look back at the picture to better know the words you need to explain to your reader.

Mi'Kel's approach changed from a student interested in writing to an empowered writer who had a strong sense of the story he wanted to tell, as he developed a plan to follow and carefully considered the needs of his readers.

Mi'Kel's scores on the MRP-R (modified for writing) reflected some of the changes observed in his behaviors during the study. While Mi'Kel demonstrated an improved perception of himself as a writer, the results indicated there was no change in his self-concept as a writer. However, the instrument did indicate there was some growth in how Mi'Kel valued writing.

Bob. Bob began the study with a high level of confidence in his ability to complete his written assignments quickly while earning a passing grade. Bob shared that he did not really like writing, but he knew enough to "do okay." He stated that his writing goals were to see how fast he could finish a writing assignment and that recently he completed his in-class opinion essay in under 10 minutes. In the interview conducted during the first week of the study, Bob expressed that he did not envision himself growing up to be a writer as, "I inherited my messy handwriting from my dad, and my weakness is spacing out my words." During the midpoint interview, Bob shared that he is finding drawing characters' faces to express meaning and feeling is challenging him, but he is enjoying drawing. He explained, "The drawing part is changing how I think about writing because I am thinking more that words are not the only way to express feelings when you write." During writing conferences in week four, Bob expressively spoke about the intricate story he was developing, that it had two stories running in parallel, with the characters' lives intersecting at some point. His writing conferences were brief as he had a clear plan and was excited to get back to his writing. By the end of the first week of independent writing, Bob had already completed an eight-page storyboard and was often seen massaging his hand for writing cramps. He also mentioned that he has started to use his writer's notebook at home to continue his work from the workshop. In the exit interview, Bob explained his new awareness of writing and on being a writer:

> So how the brain works is when we see something, it reports it to our brain. So if we have pictures, then when our brain sees it, we understand. So, drawing pictures is way easier than writing sentences, since we don't worry about punctuation and grammar. This is important in graphic novels because the picture

automatically communicates to the reader lots of details. As a writer, drawing the

pictures first helped us get down what was in our mind without thinking about or

worrying about grammar, how sentences should be, at least right away. And in the

end, you write so many words that it really hurts your hand.

Although Bob showed a great deal of interest in writing and his interview

responses indicated an improved perspective on his role as a writer, the MRP-R

(modified for writing) results did not reflect this data. In both areas evaluated on the

survey, Bob showed decreased scores in both the self-concept-as-a-writer and value-as-a-

writer scales.

MRP-R (modified). The MRP-R (modified) is an instrument that was developed to

measure both components of motivation, which is one's self-concept and how one values

the task (Gambrell et al., 1996). Data generated from this survey demonstrate the

majority of the participants in this study showed growth in both categories, self-concept

as a writer and value of writing. However, it is noted that the two participants who

demonstrated behaviors and responses to interview questions that indicated increased

levels of motivation were the only two that either showed no growth and even a decline

in growth (Table 9).

Motivation is an integral element to learning. Motivated students are typically

engaged for more sustained periods and create their own opportunities for engagement,

both in and out of school. As has been shown in studies on readers who are highly

motivated (e.g., Gambrell et al., 1996), the participants in this study who were highly

motivated to write, took control of their writing, remained engaged for extended periods,

and created occasions to write outside of the study.

Table 9

Preinterview Writing Self-Rating

Participant	Self-concept as a writer (40)		Value of writing (40)	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1. Mi'Kel	32	32	33	37
2. Jaren	24	33	32	36
3. Antonio	34	39	38	36
4. Bob	29	27	30	25
5. Darnell	28	38	31	38
6. James	34	38	32	38
7. Niko	27	37	27	33

Participants who were challenged by their confidence in the ability to draw well quickly became unmotivated and unwilling to persevere independently. During these periods, they engaged in off-task behaviors such as distracting others, checking cell phones, or wandering around the library. The researcher supported the participants in these periods with more frequent one-on-one conferences to address their challenges and provide necessary support for them to re-engage with their work. Periods of disengagement primarily occurred while individuals were creating their pre-drawing outline and when facing concerns over their ability to draw as they visualized an idea. Once pictures were drawn and storyboards completed, participants typically were motivated and engaged in writing, with no prompting needed to help them to re-engage.

Overall, data collected from multiple sources in this study indicated that most participants exhibited an improved motivation to write when drafting a story using graphic novel features. By drawing and using graphica to represent their ideas before writing, they maintained engagement in the planning process and demonstrated high

levels of commitment to their work and their writing. This motivation created sustained periods of writing during the daily afterschool sessions, and some generated their own opportunities outside of school and workshop hours. At the end of the study, when each was asked about the topic they would like to write about next, Antonio responded, "A story about myself and how I became a writer."

Research Question 3. The third research question this study sought to understand was, *how drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, influences the use of descriptive vocabulary in the narrative writing of fifth grade boys.* Copious amounts of research have been conducted linking an extensive vocabulary with greater reading comprehension skills (Anderson & Nagy, 1991; Baker et al., 1995; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). Coupled with text, the strategic use of pictures and graphica supports the development of vocabulary understanding and awareness. Specifically, student-generated illustrations have demonstrated the strongest influences over vocabulary acquisition and retention (Thornbury, 2002). Throughout this study, two themes emerged from the data suggesting that when the participants used imagery as they created their pre-writing storyboards, an awareness of (1) correlation to word usage and drawing developed and (2) using words to communicate precise meaning to the reader became the focus (Table 10).

Table 10

Themes for Research Question 3

Question 3	Theme
How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, influence the use of descriptive vocabulary in the narrative writing of 5th-grade boys?	Correlation of pictures to word usage As a writer, awareness of word usage for precision in communication to the reader

Theme 1: Correlation of pictures to words. As students develop skills that form the foundation in becoming literate adults, pictures and drawings are considered an acceptable form of communicating thought and meaning. Visual elements in any reading materials are not only credible, but actually enhance the meaning of the text and extend communication between the writer and the reader.

Throughout the six-week study, the primary focus of the mini-lessons was on the use of graphica materials to support the motivation to write as well to enhance the participants' self-perception as a writer. Both of these elements integrate the concept of seeing themselves as a writer, rather than merely participating in the act of writing. While vocabulary usage is only one aspect of a writer's knowledge, being able to generate the words to represent the concepts in one's mind is an integral part of a writer's job.

For the majority involved in the study, allowing participants to draw the pictures first suspended initial concerns about the rules and structure of writing. They were able to re-create the ideas and details of the story in their mind without concerns for grammar, sentence structure, spelling, or penmanship. Additionally, participants were able to include details in their drawings that often get lost when too much time is spent in the early stages of drafting, with concerns over such conventions. Most participants found the concept of creating a storyboard a freeing exercise that allowed them to linger over a scene, therefore providing additional time to include specificity in their details. These features served them later as they began transferring the images into written text. Jaren stated, "Once you draw the picture, it helped you see what you were going to write, and seeing that helped your writing. It also helped that when you have to leave and come back, even two weeks later, you could see where you were." This idea was significant for

Jaren as midway through the study, he missed five out of seven days during a two-week

period due to family responsibilities. Some of the drawings he completed while creating

his storyboard allowed him to re-engage in his writing after a week-long absence (Figure
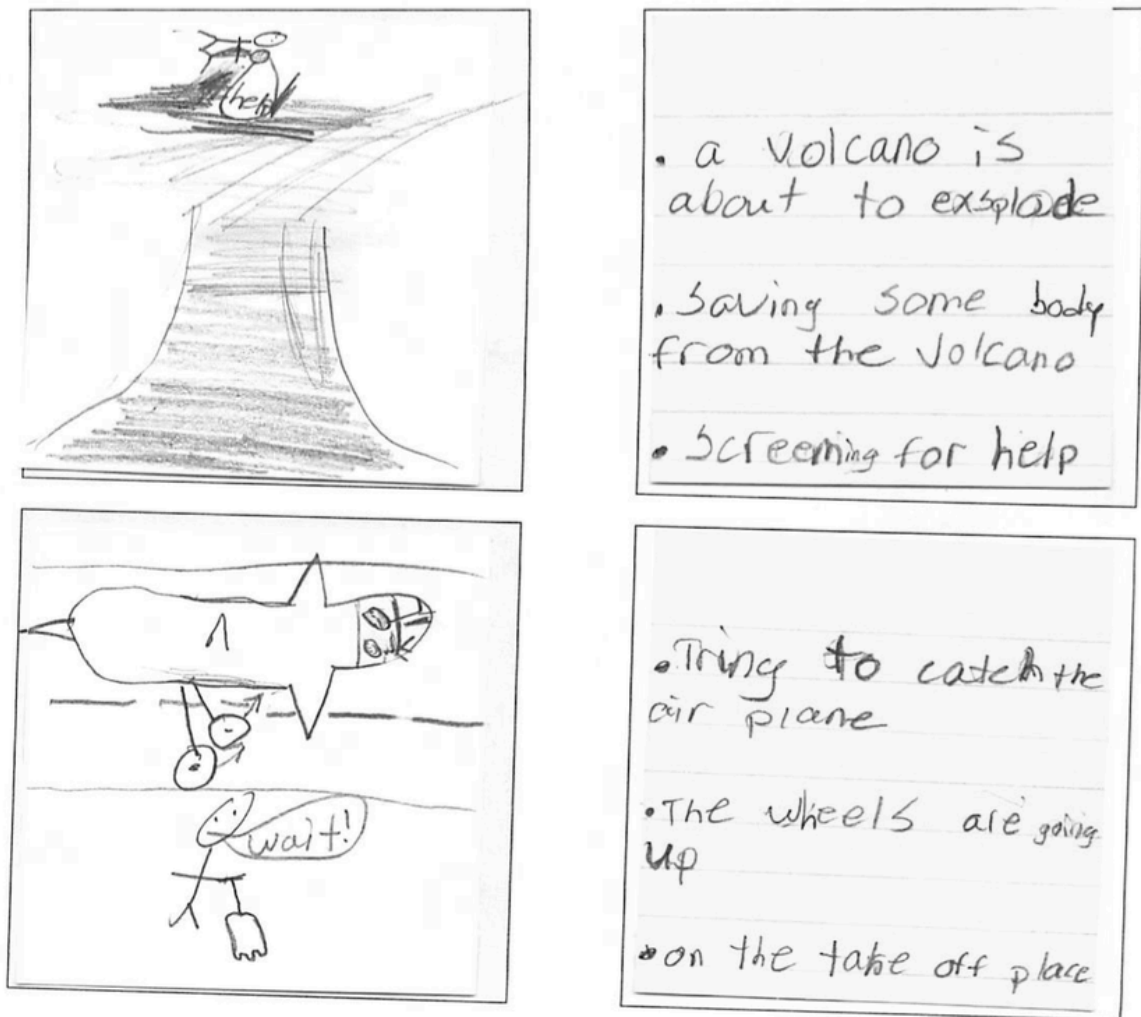
6).

Figure 6. Excerpt from one of Jaren's storyboards.

During the exit interview, each participant had the opportunity to elaborate on how

drawing during the drafting stage of writing affected their writing. All concluded that

drawing first improved their writing and supplied the details of their thinking (Table 11).

Table 11

Exit Interview Question

Participant	Question: Does drawing when you drafting your story affect your writing? Please explain.
1. Mi'Kel	Yes. If I am not as good at expressing my thoughts in words, I can just draw a picture first.
2. Jaren	Yes. If you forget something when you are writing, you can always have your drawing to look at to remember it.
3. Antonio	Yes. Now it is a routine.
4. Bob	Yes, because I get a visual picture in my mind about what is happening and what should happen. It helps me to make a picture first.
5. Darnell	Writing pictures helps show my story, and not just using words. Then I can write.
6. James	Yes. I used to write little stories, but now when I draw, I can write bigger stories.
7. Niko	Yes, you can look at the drawing and the details you were thinking and put that down on the paper in words.

Early on, Antonio and Darnell found some challenges as they questioned their artistic competency. Eventually, they became more comfortable with the awareness that there was no grade or judgment on the quality of the drawings, and embraced the idea that for this activity, the drawings were purely a tool to support their skills as a writer. In the exit interview, Antonio remarked, "Now I know, looking at the pictures before I write helps you think about and remember, and then you can write the details." Darnell also was able to affirm the value of using the drawings by stating, "The pictures I drew helped me think about the adjectives and descriptions I need to add."

Theme 2: Precision of word usage. Since the transmission of ideas and meaning is a central objective of writing, the precise use of language, which is facilitated by a rich vocabulary, is an essential element in becoming a skilled writer. Participants spent time carefully considering the details they would add to their drawings, and as a writer they

also contemplated how these drawings would influence their word choices. Antonio

explained, "Good vocabulary is important, and that means we have to work on good

vocabulary when you write, so your reader really understands what you want them to

know." Mi'Kel elaborated on the importance of word choice by explaining, "Drawing the

picture before I write helps me to remember all the little details I want to add." While

Mi'Kel's drawings were simple line drawings, the amount of information he conveyed

supported the specific details he included in his writing (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Excerpt from Mi'Kel's storyboard.

He later stated:

> As a writer, you really have to think about what you want your reader to know. Like if you are really trying to describe something, just saying *big* doesn't really communicate if the thing is really *enormous*. If we want people to really understand, we have to use words like *enormous*, or *gigantic* so they really understand.

Summary of Findings

Question 1. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affect the writer self-perception of fifth grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program? There were a number of indicators from the data that the six-week workshop experience enriched the participants' self-perception as a writer when drafting stories in a graphic novel format. Using features of graphica that are found in graphic novels to create storyboards before writing allowed participants to record their ideas in the earliest phase of the writing process. These symbols, representing their visual imagery, enabled them to tell their story and capture their thoughts while they worked on crafting their written words, fine-tuning the grammar and conventions, and selecting the precise words to represent their concept.

Data that supported the two major themes, which were confidence in writing skills and developing an increasing self-efficacy in the craft of writing, came from a variety of sources. Pre and post-interview questions that asked participants to rate themselves as a writer and then to explain the assigned score showed an increase in their self-perception. Their perceived progress was evident in the numerical evaluation participants assigned themselves and their justification of the rating.

Researcher observations also supported the findings in participants' behavioral changes as they approached their work with more focus and perseverance. In addition, the language they used when discussing their work began to demonstrate self-efficacy as a writer and ownership of their work.

Finally, the WSPS survey that was developed to understand all facets of a writer's self-perception was administered as a pre and postassessment. Overall, the majority of participants appeared to show growth through an increase in scores from the beginning of the study to the end.

Question 2. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool, affect the motivation to write of fifth grade boys participating in an afterschool writing program? The evidence from the data collected during the study indicates that drafting stories in a graphic novel format provides motivation for students to write. The two major themes which emerged from the data were an increase in initiative and persistence and an improved self-confidence in the participants' writing abilities. The qualitative data were derived through interviews, informal conversations between the researcher and participants, and from conversations that took place between participants relating to their work and their writing.

The data documented the persistence and engagement of participants, in particular as it correlated with their self-confidence. For most, the ability to express their story ideas through drawing was a gratifying approach to expressing and sharing their ideas. Participants enjoyed sharing their work as well as providing feedback to their peers. Equally, there was an eagerness for writers to share their story ideas, as the visual engagement with their storyboard elicited engaging conversations and an exchange of

ideas with their fellow writers. As they began to acknowledge themselves as writers, the

language they used also evolved, as they used phrases such as, "…my readers…" "as a

writer…," and "…my writing…".

Indicators of specific growth reinforced these observations, as time engaged in

writing between the pre and post-study writing assessment increased for all participants.

At a minimum, engagement time increased by two-and-a-half times, and at a maximum

by almost five times. These data were linked to the number of words written in each

assessment. Except for one participant, all demonstrated an increase in the number of

words written, some more substantial than others.

Finally, the MRP-R (modified) that was developed to measure motivation to read

and was modified to fit the parameters of this study was also administered as a pre and

postassessment. Through the use of this instrument, the majority of participants

demonstrated an increase in their self-concept as a writer as well as the value they place

on the craft of writing.

Question 3. How did drafting a story, using graphic novel features as a tool,

influence the use of descriptive vocabulary in the narrative writing of fifth grade boys?

While the artifacts from the data indicate some evidence that supports the enhancement

of descriptive vocabulary usage in writing when drafting stories in a graphic novel

format, it was not as compelling as the data that support the first two questions. This may

be due, in part, to the limited amount of time spent on vocabulary instruction during the

study. However, the data collected indicate that when drafting stories in a graphic novel

format there was some growth in participants' awareness of descriptive vocabulary usage

in their narrative writing. The time spent in developing story ideas in drawings allowed

participants to carefully craft supporting details that informed their written words. Writers were able to articulate the writing process; specifically, how they made word choices based on the details they included in their drawings.

Conclusion

There is clear evidence from the findings of this study that participants exhibited an improved perception of themselves as a writer, increased motivation to engage in the craft of writing, and confidence in their knowledge and abilities as a writer. Participants were so passionate about the progress they made using this process that as the study was ending they requested the opportunity to continue the after-school workshops. After gaining the consent of the researcher, they solicited permission from the school principal to continue the after-school writing club outside the boundaries of the study. The principal enthusiastically gave consent, and the classroom teacher, who indicated she had witnessed a significant improvement in the writing skills and attitudes about writing during the school day, requested permission to join the after-school club "to learn what was responsible for the change in writing the boys produced, as well as their enthusiasm for writing."

This chapter presented the outcomes from the six-week study, which include data from individual interviews and focus groups, transcripts from writing conferences, results from the WSPS and MRP-R instruments, and a collection of writing samples. The limitations of this study, the implications of these results, and suggestions for future research are discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Discussion

This study sought to understand alternate ways to support the writing skills of fifth grade boys, whose population nationally has shown a decline in writing scores over the past 20 years. With high interest from boys in the visual medium of graphic novels, opportunities were provided during the six-week study for participants to create a draft of their personal narratives using a graphic novel format before writing their final essays. The results detailed in the previous chapter support the following ideas studied.

Self-perception as a writer. After participation in the six-week study, the majority of participants demonstrated an improved perception of themselves as a writer. Many of the individuals exhibited behaviors that indicated a greater level of self-confidence in their writing skills and their ability to maintain a high level of interest in their work on a daily basis. Furthermore, participants evolved from a belief that they needed consistent direction and guidance through the writing process to developing an awareness of their competence and, subsequently, independence as a writer.

Motivation to write. In addition to a heightened confidence in writing skills, participants developed a greater initiative to write each day, along with an ardent determination to persevere when faced with challenges in both writing content and the physical strength in their hands as they wrote. They were proud of their storyboards and often used the convenience of the post-it note panels to revise their story by adding additional information as the stories evolved. Furthermore, participants projected an increased self-assurance as they shared their work and spoke of themselves as writers and referred to their craft, acknowledging the strategies they were using and the awareness of

their responsibility to their readers.

Vocabulary. While participants used their storyboard images as a visual framework to inform the descriptions and details they added to their stories, this area of the study will require additional investigation to explore the influence the images had on the vocabulary in the final writing piece. Early data supported the idea that participants used their drawings to inform their word choice and the descriptions added to their work. Time constraints became a significant factor in not thoroughly exploring this essential component of the study.

Limitations

Sample size. While sample sizes in a qualitative study typically are not large, the number of participants involved in this study was smaller than initially designed to include. However, some unanticipated factors significantly brought the number down to eight voluntary participants, who were not all struggling academically. The school has a total enrollment of 463 students, which includes 52 fifth graders; of those, 24 are boys. From that group, the lack of backup transportation for students that relied on the bus for transportation home from school, along with those who had family responsibilities, narrowed the group's size down to eight who were excited about the opportunity to participate. Of the original group of eight, one participant had irregular attendance and eventually dropped out in week five of the study due to family commitments. However, the remaining seven were enthusiastic about their participation and typically were consistent in their attendance for the entire six-week study.

Limited exposure to graphic novels. The curricular focus of the school that provided the setting for the study is a fundamental academy that features a back-to-basics

approach to teaching in the core content areas. For this reason, participants shared that there were no graphic novels used in academic lessons, and the experiences they had with any graphica material were limited to independent reading opportunities outside of school. While this deficit of knowledge provided an opportunity for the researcher to expose participants early on to accurate methods of interpreting graphic features, the amount of time to cover the most rudimentary information was enough to provide the basics, which allowed those involved to get started using and understanding the materials. Furthermore, all of the participants required significant time with beginning exercises exposing them to the basics of drawing faces that exhibited emotions and mood to experimenting with independently drawing one-panel comics with an emphasis on communicating meaning without words.

This limited exposure led to two challenges. First, participants excited about exploring the medium wanted to spend time only reading the resources provided. They were given as much time as possible to read the materials; however, their limited experience with the medium left them with a superficial level of knowledge about using and interpreting the most basic of features of graphica. Second, the brief exposure left some participants lacking confidence in their ability to effectively communicate their thoughts and ideas with their perceived drawing deficiencies. Specifically, two individuals who were initially very confident in their abilities as a writer became demotivated to draw when it came to the creation of their storyboards. Through the researcher closely monitoring progress in multiple writing conferences in each session, one participant was able to persevere and slowly regain his confidence, while the other chose not to persist and, by the time the study ended, wrote less on his post-study

narrative essay than he did on his pre-study essay.

Time constraints. Time constraints became a limitation in this study in two areas. First, a daily six-week afterschool program became taxing on the schedules of participants and their families. Family commitments, doctor appointments, and relied-upon sibling support created an environment where attendance averaged 76%. Due to the amount of information covered in this study and the lack of significant familiarity with the topic and medium, the high level of absenteeism required almost daily sessions with those returning to review missed topics.

Within the structure of a classroom that incorporates writing daily over an approximately 180-day school year, a multi-layered activity such as the one implemented in this study would not have taken place so early in the year. Initially, comprehensive background knowledge about the writing process, along with familiarity and experience with reading and interpreting graphic novels, would be in place before implementation of this multifaceted process.

Additionally, the parameter of a six-week study did not capture the true picture of the actual time spent on task on the topic explored. A notable amount of time was dedicated in the first and sixth week toward compiling pre and post-data through the collection of writing samples, individual interviews, and the completion of both surveys. Furthermore, three additional days were lost to unavoidable events, including a fire drill, a teacher workday, and the presidential election as the building became the community polling place. All totaled, four, four-day weeks remained for the instruction and implementation of the new skills.

Modification of measurement tool. The Motivation to Read Profile-Revised

(MRP-R), which was used to respond to research question two, is a reliable and validated instrument originally published in 1996 and revised in 2013 as the MRP-R. The primary focus of this tool is to provide information to educators to better understand ways they can support and shape a student's motivation to read, and therefore improve outcomes in achievement (Gambrell et al., 1996). The MRP-R incorporates both an independent survey and conversational interview questions to explore the deeper aspects of what motivates students as readers. In the absence of an instrument to assess the motivation to write, permission was requested by the researcher and granted by the authors of the MRP-R to modify the survey and interview questions to inquire about facets of writing accompanied by familiarity with graphic novels. While this modification of a valid tool provided a reliable structure to the questions that were reviewed by experts in the field, the changes in wording may have affected the validity of the responses.

Interpretation and bias. The nature of qualitative research requires the interpretation of large quantities of open-ended data. Although careful steps were taken to ensure impartiality while coding the data to uncover the underlying themes, when engaging with participants on a daily basis, it is possible that bias entered in during the interpretation process. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained copious records based solely on observations, including precise quotes from participants as they explained their work and ideas. Subsequently, these notes of documented experiences, along with the themes that emerged during the process of coding the data, allowed the researcher to maintain a high degree of objectivity to the outcomes. While this was a qualitative study, some instruments compiling quantitative measures were utilized to inform the observational and anecdotal findings.

Implications

This study combined two complex literacy practices to understand if one medium may be used as a tool to support the skill development of the other. In this qualitative study, the researcher sought to understand if engagement in the writing process would increase when the participants acquired specific knowledge of how to represent their ideas visually, as is done in graphic novels and other forms of graphica. Although graphic novels were used as a tool to support writing in the current study, past research has demonstrated that graphic novels can be complex pieces of literature that require sophisticated awareness of the medium to effectively engage with and interpret (Bell, 2007; Bitz, 2004; Frey & Fisher, 2008; Olshansky, 2008).

Future research. As there is limited research on the combination of writing and drawing, more information is necessary to understand if greater insights could be ascertained with a larger sample size during an extended period. A longitudinal study would yield a greater collection of data, which might allow researchers to understand the impact on a student's ability to better express visual processes through writing. Additionally, in order to ascertain whether the outcomes of this study are specific to the age or gender of the participants, future studies might explore outcomes for a group of female participants or for students of a different age group.

What emerged as a key finding in this study was that participants became engaged in the writing process because of their passion for graphic novels and comic books, rather than for the writing component of the investigation. This enthusiasm for the medium nurtured higher levels of motivation to create storyboards that represented their ideas, and that interest carried forward as they worked to translate their drawings to text.

Throughout this process, participants were hopeful to have time to adapt their narratives into a graphic novel format. For readers, the graphica medium is a prominent format for the communication of complex ideas. Future research might explore furthering ways for participants as writers to express ideas and communicate meaning through the creation of original graphica materials and books.

As this study explored student use of graphica when creating a narrative, future research might seek to understand ways that students use the medium to demonstrate their knowledge through the creation of informational text across all curricular content areas. Graphic novels can be created as a culminating project at the end of a historical unit of study, scientific inquiry, a unit of study in art, or possibly the creation of informational or instructional brochures in health and physical education.

Conclusion

As educators work to meet the changing needs of the tech-savvy learner, it is clear that of the multimodal tools people use to make meaning, the information communicated through visual images is paramount in making meaning in the 21st century classroom (Burmark, 2008; Lyga & Lyga, 2004). Graphic novels are not the simplistic text that were once considered frivolous by many in the field of education. Rather, graphic novels convey complex ideas that require the reader to make meaning by using a multilayered approach as they decode both images and written text (Moline, 1995). The same effort is applied as writers work to communicate meaningfully with their readers. As demonstrated in this study, the use of graphic novels as a tool to support and motivate students as writers is a noteworthy idea as educators explore engaging ways to help students access meaning from multiple modes.

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Appendix A

Introductory Letter to Parents

Dear Parents,

My name is Sandi Sumerfield and I am a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University. I am conducting a research study on different ways to help students to become better writers. This study includes the use of comic books and graphic novels to learn how they may support writing. There is already a great deal of research on the benefits of graphic novels and how they support reading, and I would like to see if they can also support writing.

With your permission, I would like to invite your child to participate in this research study. Participating students will attend an afterschool writing workshop, from 2:30 – 3:30, Monday – Thursday, for 6 weeks. Since these sessions are not part of the regular school day, your child will not miss any classroom instruction. Your child's name will not be used in the research and all information collected will be destroyed once the study is completed. The writing assessments they will take at the beginning of the study and end of the study are not graded and will not be included on their report card.

Enclosed is a detailed permission slip for you to review. If you are interested in your child participating in this afterschool workshop, please fill out the enclosed permission slip and return it to your child's homeroom teacher as soon as possible. The study will begin on Monday October 10th and end on Thursday November 17th.

If you have any questions, or would like to meet in person and look over the books and materials I will be using, please feel free to contact me at ▉▉▉▉▉▉▉.

Sincerely,

Sandi Sumerfield
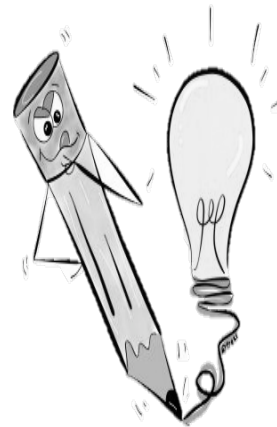
Appendix B

Parental Consent Form

Parent/Guardian Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled:

Using Graphic Novels as a Tool to Support the Writing Skills of Fifth Grade Boys

Funding Source: None.

IRB protocol#

Principal investigator: Co-investigator
Sandi Sumerfield, MA, Ed.   Maryann Tobin, PhD.
                                                              c/o Ashley Russom, Ed.D.
                                                              Fischler College of Education
                                                              1750 NE 167th Street
                                                              North Miami Beach, FL 33162
                                                              800-986-3223, Ext. 27838

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Site Information:

What is the research about?

I am conducting a research study on other ways to help students learn different ways to improve their writing skills. You are being asked to let your child participate in this research study to better understand if drawing their ideas before writing will improve their writing, and also if these methods will help them feel more confident as a writer. This study includes the use of graphic novels and comic books, and uses them in ways that may support students as writers. There is a great deal of research on the ways graphic novels support reading, and this study investigate if these materials will also support writing. Boys are going to be the subject for this study because research has shown that boys typically need more support in writing than do girls. In addition, research has shown that boys show more interest in comic books and graphic novels, when choosing materials to read.

Initials_____Date_____   Page **1** of **5**

What will (I and/or) my child be doing?

Our study group will meet afterschool from 2:30 – 3:30 on Monday – Thursday, for 6 weeks. During the first and last weeks, I will ask students to answer some questions about what kind of writer they are, to better understand how confident they are in their writing ability. I will also ask for them to write a story for me at the beginning and end of the study to understand if the experience helped them improve as a writer. After the first week, each time we meet we will read and talk about graphic novels and comic books. We will also talk about writing, and practice different ways of telling a story through drawing pictures. We will then uses those pictures to help us write our stories. During this workshop, the students will work with small groups, with partners, and one-on-one with me.

Is there any audio or video recording?

This research project will include audio recordings using a tape recorder and cassette tapes, of students talking with the researcher during the interview and writing conferences. This audio recording will be available to be heard by the researcher, the IRB at Nova Southeastern University, and the dissertation chair for the researcher conduction the study. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher, Sandra Sumerfield. The recording will be kept securely in a locked file cabint. The recording will be kept for 36 months and destroyed after that time by shredding all paper and recorded materials. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described in this paragraph.

What dangers are there for (me and/or) my child?

There is a minimal risk that your child may find it too difficult to be involved in a workshop immediately after school, 4 days a week. Since these sessions are not part of the regular school day, your child will not miss any classroom instruction. In addition, because of the group setting of the workshop, there is a minimal risk that your child will be identified as a participant in a study, and by association, an at-risk student. However, all steps are being taken to keep all information private for all participants. If you have any questions about the research or your research rights, or (you or) your child has a research-related injury, please contact Sandi Sumerfield at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions as to your research rights

What good things might come about for (me and/or) my child?

While there are no direct benefits, some of the good things that might happen:

Initials_____Date_____   Page **2** of **5**

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1. Your child will get to read many interesting books that use pictures to tell the story.
2. Your child might learn new ways to think about how to write with more details in their stories.
3. Your child will get to work with one-on-one with the researcher and his peers, to get more support in developing stronger writing skills.

Do I have to pay for anything?

There are no costs for (you or) your child's participation in this study.

Will I or my child get paid?

There are no payments made for participating in this study

How will my (and/or my child's) information be kept private and confidential?

In order to keep all information private, students will be assigned a number at the onset of the study and all information, consent forms, and work completed by the students will not use real names, but rather their numbers. All materials collected during the study will remain in a locked filing cabinet throughout the study, where it will be stored for the required 36-month period after the study. All documents will be shredded after this time. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The IRB at Nova Southeastern University, its regulatory agencies, and dissertation chair/thesis adviser may review research records.

What if I do not want my child to be in the study or my child doesn't want to be in the study?

You have the right to refuse for your child to participate or withdraw your child at any time. Your child may also refuse to participate or withdraw.   If you do withdraw your child, or your child decides not to participate, neither you nor your child will experience any penalty or loss of services that you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw your child, or he/she decides to leave, any information collected about your child **before** the date of withdrawal will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

Other Considerations:

 If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to

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your willingness to have your child continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by the investigators.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
  you voluntarily agree for your child to participate in the study entitled "Using Graphic Novels as a Tool to Support the Writing Skills of Fifth Grade Boys

Child's Name: _____

Parent's/Guardian Signature: _____ Date:_____

Parent's/Guardian Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Initials_____Date_____

Appendix C

Introductory Letter to Students

Hello,

My name is Mrs. Sumerfield, I used to be a teacher, and now I am a student at Nova Southeastern University. Just like you, I am going to school each day hoping to learn things I can use in my job. Right now, I am doing research that will help me learn more about how using comic books and graphic novels in a classroom might make students stronger writers. Many people have studied this idea and learned that that using graphic books helps students become better readers. I am interested in understanding if they can also help students become better writers. To study this, I need to see how fifth-graders might use drawing to help them plan their stories before they write them.

I will be studying this idea in an afterschool writing workshop for 6 weeks on Monday –Thursday from 2:30 to 3:30. We will talk about graphic novels, do some writing, make storyboards by drawing pictures, and then use those pictures to write a story. Students will work in small groups, with partners, and one-on-one with me. At the beginning and end of the 6 weeks everyone will write a story, then answer some survey and interview questions.

Please talk with your family to see if this is something you would like to do. Remember, it is your choice to join the group for 6 weeks. None of the work done in the afterschool workshop goes into your grade book and I will keep your records private.

I am looking forward to talking to you and tell you more about the study if you are interested.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Sumerfield
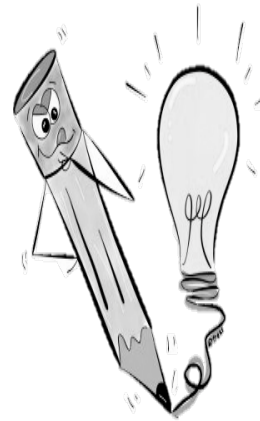
Appendix D

MRP - Modified

1. My friends think I am

○ a very good writer

○ a good writer

○ an OK writer

○ a poor writer

2. Writing is something I like to do

○ never

○ almost never

○ sometimes

○ often

3. When I get stuck in my writing, I

○ almost always figure it out.

○ sometimes figure it out.

○ almost never figure it out.

○ never figure it out.

4. My friends think writing is

○ really fun

○ fun

○ OK to do

○ not fun at all

5. I write

○ not as well as my firends

○ about the same as my friends

○ a little better than my friends

○ a lot better than my friends

6. I tell my friends about things I write.

( ) I never do this.

( ) I almost never do this.

( ) I do this some of the time.

( ) I do this a lot.

7. When I am writing by myself, I understand

( ) everything I need to do to have a good piece of writing.

( ) some of the things I need to do to have a good piece of writing.

( ) almost none of the things I need to do to have a good piece of writing.

( ) none of the things I need to do to have a good piece of writing.

8. People who write a lot are

( ) very interesting

( ) sort of interesting

( ) sort of boring

( ) very boring

9. I am

( ) a bad writer

( ) an OK writer

( ) a good writer

( ) a very good writer.

10. I think writing is

( ) a really great way to spend my time

( ) a great way to spend my time

( ) a boring way to spend my time

( ) a really boring way to spend my time

11. I worry about what other kids will think about my writing

◯ a lot

◯ sometimes

◯ almost never

◯ never

12. I think becoming a good writer is

◯ not very important

◯ sort of important

◯ important

◯ not very important

13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have written,

◯ I can never think of an answer

◯ I almost never think of an answer

◯ I sometimes think of an answer

◯ I can always think of an answer

14. I think spending time writing is

◯ really boring

◯ boring

◯ great

◯ really great

15. Writing is

◯ very easy for me

◯ kind of easy for me

◯ kind of hard for me

◯ very hard for me

16. When my teacher shares her own writing with the class, I think it is

○ really great

○ great

○ boring

○ really boring

17. When I am talking with the class about something I have written,

○ I hate to talk about my ideas

○ I don't like to talk about my ideas

○ I like to talk about my ideas

○ I love to talk about my ideas

18. When I have free time, I spend

○ none of my time writing

○ very little of my time writing

○ some of my time writing

○ a lot of my time writing

19. When I read my writing to someone else, I think I am

○ a bad writer

○ an OK writer

○ a good writer

○ a very good writer

20. If someone gave me a writers notebook for a present, I would be

○ very happy

○ happy

○ unhappy

○ very unhappy

Appendix E

MRP Permission

Sandi Sumerfield <sandi@warmbluewaters.com>

Wed, Jul 13, 2016 at 11:52 AM

To: malloy2@clemson.edu, marinak@msmary.edu, lgamb@clemson.edu, suemazzoni@gmail.com

Good Morning Dr. Malloy, Dr. Marinak, Dr. Gambrell, and Dr. Mazonni

I hope this finds you all well.

Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Sandi Sumerfield and I am a doctoral candidate at Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, where I am working on an EdD. While my concentration is Reading, writing plays a central role in my research topic: Using Graphic Novels and Graphica to Support Struggling Writers. Part of the focus of my study will be to understand if allowing students to draw out their story in the planning stages will motivate them to write more and improves the quality of their vocabulary usage.

Through my research, I have read with great interest the work of others using your Motivation to Read Profile (MRP). Your work on motivation and student engagement over the past 20 years has been inspiring!

While I am not focusing on motivation to *read* for my research, I am interested in the motivation to write, and I think using a modified version of your instruments may help with my inquiry. In particular, I would like permission to substitute the word(s) "write/writing" in places where you have "read/reading," along with minor grammatical changes to maintain the integrity in phrasing. I recently read the 2010 dissertation of Dr. Karen Gavigan, who modified your interview questions to include a component on Graphic Novels. I would also like permission to add that component to my interview.

Please let me know if you have additional questions or would like to see the final revisions proposed before making your decision.

Kindest regards,

Sandi ☺

Jacquelynn Malloy <malloy2@g.clemson.edu>

Wed, Jul 13, 2016 at 1:37 PM

To: Sandi Sumerfield <sandi@warmbluewaters.com>

Sandi,

We have a motivation to write in our queue to work on soon, but have no problem with you adapting the MRP-R for your use in this particular study.
Please know that you'll have to run your own reliability and validity of the instrument on a pilot sample, as the ones we report for the MRP-R will not apply to any adaptions of the instrument.

Good luck and keep in touch!

Jackie

[Quoted text hidden]
--
"Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are."
— Benjamin Franklin

Appendix F

Student Assent Form

Student Assent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled:

Using Graphic Novels as a Tool to Support the Writing Skills of Fifth Grade Boys

Funding Source: None.

IRB approval #

Principal investigator:
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What is a research study?

People research ideas in order to learn new things. Sometimes this is called a "study" as people want to learn more about the specific idea they are interested in. Before the research study begins, other people will be asked if they would like to participate in the study and only people who decide they want to help will be in the study. I will tell you more about the study and then you should take time to make your decision. You should talk to your parents or your guardian before you decide.

Why is this study being done?

I am going to school each day hoping to learn things I can use in my job later. Right now, I am doing research that will help me learn more about how using graphic novels and comic books in a classroom might make students better writers. Many of you enjoy reading graphic books, like comic books. Some people who have studied comic books in schools have learned that using these books help students become better readers. I want to learn if they can also help students become better writers. To study this, I need to see how fifth-graders might use drawing to help them plan their stories before they write them.

Initials_____Date_____

What will happen to me?

Each time we meet we will read some graphic novels and comics, and talk about them, too. We will also talk about writing, and practice different ways of telling a story, even by drawing pictures. We will then uses those pictures to help us write our stories. During this workshop, you will work with small groups, with partners, and one-on-one with me. At the beginning of the 6-weeks I will ask everyone to write a story, answering some questions on a piece of paper, and then answer some questions by talking with me. They will also do these same activities at the end of the 6 weeks.

What are the good things about being in the study?

Some of the good things that might happen:

1. You will get to read many interesting books that use pictures to tell the story.
2. You might learn new ways to think about how to write more details in your stories.
3. You will get to work with friends, and give each other encouragement and help with their stories.

Will being in the study hurt me?

I do not think being in this study will hurt you, but you may find that writing stories using pictures is boring or too confusing.

How long will I be in the study?

This study will take place for 6 weeks. We will meet afterschool for 1 hour, 4 days a week, on Monday –Thursday from 2:30 to 3:30.

Do I have other choices?

You can decide to not be in the study.

Will people know that I am in the study?

Your parents, teachers, and principal will know you are in the study, but they won't tell anyone else. When I write about the study, I will never use your name. Also, the other students in your group will know you are in the study. We will always remind each other to be respectful of each other and their work.

Whom should I ask if I have questions?

If you have any questions, you should talk with your principal, ███████. You should also talk with your parents or guardian.

Is it OK if I say "No, I don't want to be in the study"?

You do not have to be a part of this study if you don't want to. No one will be mad or upset. If you change your mind, you can decide during the study to stop being in the study.

Do you understand and do you want to be in the study?

I understand. All my questions were answered.

❑ I want to be in the study.
❑ I don't want to be in the study.

_____

Your name

_____   _____

Your signature   Date

_____   _____

Signature of person explaining the study   Date

Appendix G

Pre-Write Outline

Story overview	Characters	Setting
		Fiction/Nonfiction?

BEGINNING: _____

_____

_____

DETAIL 1: _____

     A. _____

     B. _____

DETAIL 2: _____

     A. _____

     B. _____

DETAIL 3: _____

     A. _____

     B. _____

ENDING: _____

_____

_____